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## COOPERATE TO VALIDATE

OBSERVATION-NET EXPERTS' REPORT ON VALIDATION OF  
NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING (VNIL) 2013

Authors: Saskia Weber Guisan, Janine Voit, Sonja Lengauer,  
Eva Proinger, Ruud Duvekot and Kirsten Aagaard

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**Cooperate to Validate. OBSERVAL-NET experts reports on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning (VNIL) 2013**

<b>Authors:</b>	Saskia Weber Guisan, Janine Voit, Sonja Lengauer, Eva Proinger, Ruud Duvekot and Kirsten Aagaard
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## | *vnit* Introduction



The present publication is one of the outcomes of the OBSERVAL-NET project (follow-up of the OBSERVAL project).

The main aim of OBSERVAL-NET was to set up a stakeholder-centric network of organisations supporting the validation of non-formal and informal learning in Europe based on the formation of national working groups in the 8 participating countries of the project. Each national working group worked towards bringing together key stakeholders in VNIL and political decision-makers at national level in order to coordinate policy implementation in the field. These national networks were supplemented by a cross-national level of networking, which focused on the following three thematic areas outlined in this publication:

- **The bottom-up process:**  
The role of grassroots initiatives in supporting VNIL, and strategies towards mainstreaming them
- **VNIL at the workplace:**  
The competence profile required for VNIL practitioners
- **VNIL professionals:**  
Success factors in the implementation of VNIL in employment settings

The vocabulary used in the lifelong learning area is not completely fixed yet. This is even more noticeable in the field of recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning. Over many years, different terms have been used such as “Recognition of prior learning”(RPL), “Accreditation of prior learning”(APL) and “Validation of prior learning”(VPL). Sometimes, one might also see “Recognition of prior learning outcomes”(RPLO). Recognition, Accreditation and Validation cover distinct stages in the field. For example, recognition does not mean certification, while validation usually does. “Prior learning” has now been replaced by “Informal / non-formal learning” and the term used within the OBSERVAL-NET project is “Validation”. Thus, the term used for this report is “Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning”, hereafter VNIL.

\* OBSERVAL was a European funded project implemented by EUCEN (the European University Continuing Education Network), together with project partners from 24 countries of the European Union representing the different educational sectors, namely higher education, vocational education and training and adult education. The main objective of the OBSERVAL project was to create a database on validation of non-formal and informal learning in European countries that would be regularly updated, available in a European Observatory and accessible online. In this way the project sought to provide comprehensive, comparable and updated information to a wide range of actors, such as decision makers at national and institutional level, social partners, human resources managers or individuals involved in the validation of informal and non-formal learning.



# 01 Grassroots promotion of the Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning

By Saskia Weber Guisan, Janine Voit, Sonja Lengauer and Eva Proinger

## 1.1 Introduction

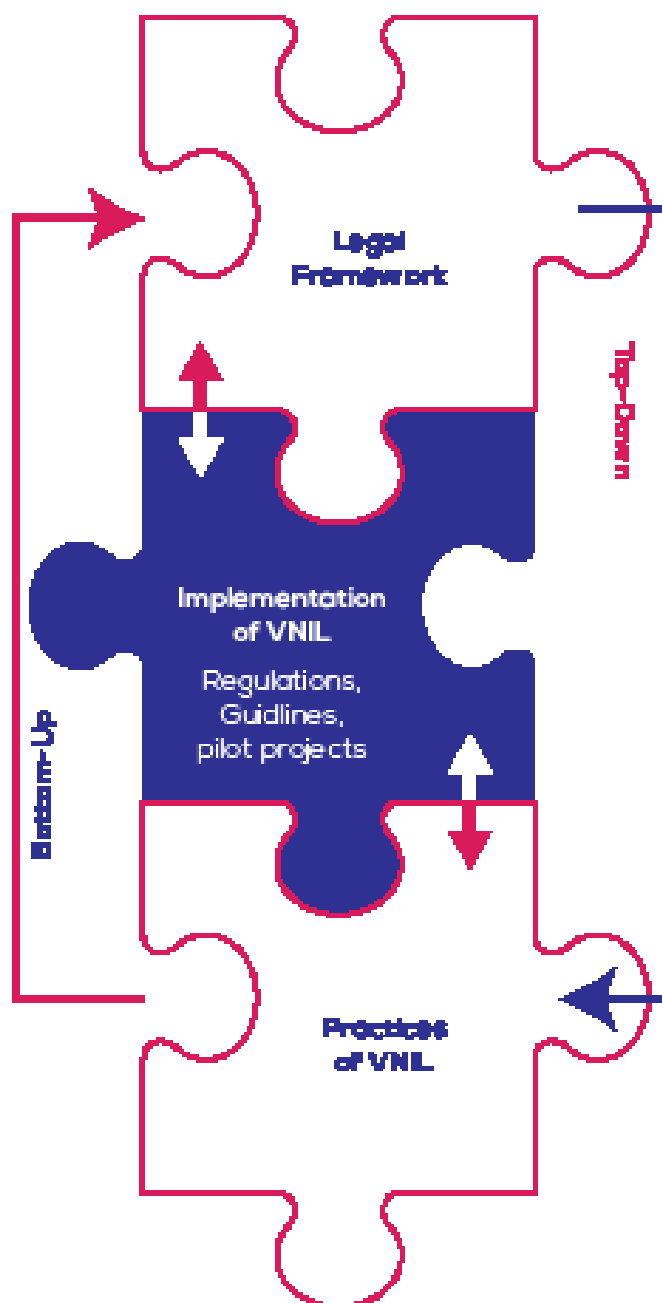
As part of the Leonardo-OBSERVAL project 100 high-quality cases were collected on the state of Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning (VNIL) practices in 27 European countries, including specific strategies supporting its implementation. At that time, different topics were derived from this very rich material and were chosen to be analysed in the OBSERVAL-NET project, a successor of the OBSERVAL project. This included research on the role of grassroots initiatives in supporting VNIL, and strategies towards mainstreaming them. In this way, the Oberval-net project seeks to support the development of coherent, comprehensive and flexible models for VNIL practices and recommendations, drawn from a comparative analysis of examples of best practice across European countries. The following chapter reviews these grassroots initiatives and aims, in particular, to analyse case studies with a specific focus on the bottom-up perspective. It provides a list of best practices arising from the comparative analysis of the case studies.

## 1.2 The Bottom-Up theme

In contrast to top-down approaches that are governed at system level, bottom-up approaches or grassroots initiatives mean that

- the initiative for VNIL actions comes from the “field”, through the initiative of professional groups and/or local organisations in response to identified needs;
- the actions taken are implemented through the strong and active role and involvement of practitioners or executing institutions;
- the actions taken at grassroots level have an influence on the system as a whole.

The diagram below shows this transversal process, and also the circularity and the interactions between top and bottom.



Bearing this in mind, the following criteria have been elaborated to select case studies and practices related to the bottom-up approach:

1. Professional groups, local organisations, executing institutions or providers have reacted to identified needs.
2. A process of development action is driven by professional groups, local organisations, institutions or certain providers.
3. Professional groups, local organisations, executing institutions or providers have taken the initiative to launch the process.
4. Professional groups, local organisations, executing institutions or providers are collaborating on the project.
5. The action has an influence on the above structure.

The bottom-up approach is not a theme in itself, but rather a transversal process in the implementation of VNIL process and practices, including issues, such as VNIL at the workplace and the emergence of VNIL professionals, which will be further explored in the following chapters. For those reasons, the case studies taken into account for analysis may include several of these themes. Indeed, some of them may have either of the two themes, namely work-based learning, or VNIL professionals as their focus of analysis provided these examples reflect a bottom-up approach.

## 1.3 Methodology & Data

### 1.3.1 Methodology

The data analysed for this report came from two sources. The first source was the observatory, which is a database comprising case studies and other material related to VNIL established as a

result of the Leonardo project OBSERVAL<sup>1</sup>. As a basis for selecting relevant case studies from among the 80 available in the observatory, we first described the bottom-up approach and defined criteria as outlined above. On this basis the project partners of the OBSERVAL and OBSERVAL-NET projects, who had submitted one or more case studies to the observatory were contacted, to make an initial selection of case studies based on the definition and criteria of the bottom-up approach. In this regard, they were asked to provide further information on the said case studies based on a short questionnaire covering the main points of definition of the bottom-up approach (see appendix 1). Answers were received from 12 countries, out of which three indicated that their cases did not follow the bottom-up approach. The nine remaining countries (AT, CH, DE, DK, NL, PT, SE, ES & RO) indicated 15 case studies matching the definition outlined above. A general overview of the 15 case studies was compiled (see section 2.2) in order to get an initial picture of the cases and to confirm their relevance for the analysis. Based on this review, three case studies were excluded due to a lack of information and/or no obvious matching with the bottom-up criteria. Therefore, the analysis is based on an initial source comprising descriptions of 12 case studies: one from Austria (AT), three from Switzerland (CH), one from Germany (DE), three from Denmark (DK), one from the Netherlands (NL), one from Portugal (PT), one from Sweden (SE) and one from Spain (ES). It is assumed that this is only a very small, partial and heterogeneous of cases of VNIL with a bottom-up approach.

Apart from the use of the observatory as a source of case studies, new cases that are exemplary of the bottom-up approach were integrated into the analysis in a second phase, out of which two from Austria and two from Switzerland.

<sup>1</sup> [www.observaleucen.eu/](http://www.observaleucen.eu/)

Based on these considerations the following list of best-practice examples has been drawn up containing 16 case studies, which illustrate different aspects of the bottom-up approach.

### 1.3.2 Overview of selected Case Studies (Best Practice List)

Country	Title of Case Study (CS)	Brief description	Reasons for VNIL (identified needs)
AT	CS1: Informal Competence Acquisition and Educational Guidance	The case study is a sub-project within an -Austrian project on educational guidance. The main goal was to develop, test and implement tools for the work of educational counsellors with their target group to identify informally acquired competences, to sensitise both counsellors and clients to informal learning, and to provide them with guidance about existing or missing skills when taking educational decisions.	The target group comprises clients who have acquired competences in special fields of activity but have no certificates to prove these competences or are not even aware that they possess these competences. The target group were people with a migration background, disabled people, young people with special needs, and people interested in second-chance education, especially those trying to get access to tertiary education via the Higher Education Entrance Examination.
AT*	CS2: Wissen, was ich kann ('I know what I can') – Burgenland	The CS presents a workshop series. The workshops apply the CH-Q model for competence management; participants create a personal competence portfolio where they learn to establish, assess and evidence their competences and merits from various areas of activities(training, paid and unpaid work, family), verify learning processes, draw conclusions, etc. Additionally, there is the possibility of attending a one-day assessment carried out by external assessors.	Individuals reflect their personal competences, learn to establish, assess and evidence their competences and merits from various areas of activities(training, paid and unpaid work, family), verify learning processes and draw conclusions.

	Qualification obtained after VNIL	Institutions involved and sectors concerned	Specificities of bottom-up approach (characteristics)
	No qualification was obtained in this case study. The outcome is a competence profile which can be used for applications, e.g. for finding a job or getting access to an educational or training programme.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ring Österreichischer Bildungswerke (RÖBW, a platform of Austrian Adult Education Associations)</li> </ul> <p>The project was funded by the ESF and the BMUKK (Federal Ministry for Education, the Arts and Culture in Austria).</p> <p>Adult education / Third sector</p>	The tools were developed within an umbrella institution for adult education and were implemented in several local adult education centres. The tools were developed in response to the identified needs of the target group, to reflect on prior (informal) learning processes more systematically, and to improve the documentation and planning of educational processes in order to combat unemployment.
	Upon successful completion of the workshop series, participants receive the CH-Q certificate for self-competence management (level 1).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adult Education Centre of Burgenland (VHS Burgenland)</li> <li>CVET provider institution of the Chamber of Labour and the Austrian Trade Union Association (BFI Burgenland)</li> <li>CVET provider institution of the Economic Chamber(WIFI Burgenland);</li> <li>Regulatory partners:</li> <li>Federal Chamber of Labour (Arbeiterkammer Burgenland),</li> <li>Economic Chamber(Wirtschaftskammer Burgenland),</li> <li>Public Employment Service(Arbeitsmarktservice Burgenland),</li> <li>Austrian Trade Union Federation(Österreichischer Gewerkschaftsbund Burgenland),</li> <li>Federation of Austrian Industry (Industriellenvereinigung Burgenland)</li> <li>Provincial School Board, Burgenland (Landesschulrat Burgenland)</li> </ul>	The initiative comes from one educational institution: the adult education centre in Burgenland (one of the nine Austrian federal states).

Country	Title of Case Study (CS)	Brief description	Reasons for VNIL (identified needs)
AT*	CS3: wba (Weiterbildung skademie Österreich)	wba is an institution for the recognition and accreditation of adult educators in Austria. wba sets standards and strengthens the professionalisation of adult education because it enables those taking part in its certification process to gain a qualification that is widely recognised within the profession. Practical experience in the field of adult education is a prerequisite for certification by the Academy.	Before 2007 there was no standardised system of vocational training for adult educators in Austria. The institutions involved developed and founded the wba for a variety of reasons: to set overall quality standards in the field of adult education, to develop a recognition model so that adult educators do not have to start from scratch when enrolling in a training programme, to enhance the professionalisation of adult educators, and to enable the clients to continue their education at university level.
CH	CS1: Val-Form qualification procedure for metalworkers	The CS presents three points of view (candidate, skills advisor and chief expert assessor) on a local procedure to validate professional skills in metalworking for adults with work experience but no corresponding VET qualifications. The CS shows the interactions and the negotiated process between advisors and experts.	The Canton of Valais already had several processes for VNIL, but none in the construction sector. The local construction sector umbrella organisation had strongly supported and encouraged such initiatives. There were no real needs (action on unemployment or a need to have more qualified people in the field) but a strong desire to innovate in a field that had not been covered by a VNIL procedure.
CH	CS2: Community interpreters	The CS presents a bottom-up procedure for the qualification of community interpreters. It describes the initial needs that initiated the process, then the partnership for the construction of a qualification suitable either for those with experience (as was the case for this CS) or for newer community interpreters. The CS outlines the outcomes of the procedure - for the candidates, for the labour market and for the professionalisation of a sector traditionally occupied by volunteers.	The CS was brought about by the need to improve the quality and the availability of interpreting services in healthcare, educational and social work sectors. There was a clear will to professionalise the field of interpreting services that had mainly been occupied by volunteers. Therefore, there was a demand from the labour market for more interpreters (with increasing immigration) and from volunteers, who needed social and financial recognition of their competences to be able to enter the labour market.

	Qualification obtained after VNIL	Institutions involved and sectors concerned	Specificities of bottom-up approach (characteristics)
	<p>wba-certificate I: certified adult educator (status-quo evaluation, competences in educational theory, didactics, management of educational events, guidance and counselling, librarianship and information management, social competence, personal competence, elective subjects.</p> <p>wba-certificate II: graduate adult educator (four possibilities for specialisation: teaching and training, educational management, counselling, and librarianship).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ bifeb, Federal Institute for Adult Education), also the responsible body for wba</li> <li>○ Association of Austrian Adult Education Centres(KEBÖ; cooperative System)</li> <li>○ wba financed by the Ministry of Education, the Arts and Culture, the ESF and clients.</li> </ul>	<p>wba takes into account the need for professionalisation; wba takes into account former experience and the non-formal learning of participants.</p>
	Federal VET Diploma in Metalworking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The Canton of Valais Office for Occupational, Educational and Career Guidance</li> <li>○ Canton of Valais Builders Association (a local umbrella organisation representing various occupations in the construction sector)</li> </ul> <p>VET sector / Building sector</p>	<p>Partnership between a local umbrella association and the cantonal office for occupational, educational and career guidance to launch and manage the process. The qualification procedure for metalworkers was launched prior to the national framework stipulated by OPET (Federal Office for Professional Education and Technology).</p>
	Swiss INTERPRET certificate for community interpreters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ INTERPRET Association</li> <li>○ Federal Office of Public Health</li> <li>○ Swiss Federation of Adult Learning (SVEB)</li> <li>○ Training centres</li> <li>○ Interpreters' placement agencies</li> </ul> <p>Third/ Voluntary sector</p>	<p>Very strong bottom-up approach with collaborative work between several institutions from different sectors and supported by a federal agency.</p>

Country	Title of Case Study (CS)	Brief description	Reasons for VNIL (identified needs)
CH	CS3 Equivalence assessment for the Federal PET Diploma in Adult Education and Training	The CS presents the qualification procedure for the Federal PET Diploma in Adult Education and Training, in particular the equivalence assessment procedure. The CS is based on interviews with different stakeholders.	Many people were working as adult educators, but there was no federal recognition for the training given to them. The first need was to establish a federal diploma, then to establish qualification procedures. Two qualification procedures were launched in parallel: a traditional one, with exams, and a VNIL process (with equivalence assessment). The basic idea was to tailor the procedure to the needs of adults (i.e. people with work experience, meaning a competences-oriented procedure).
CH	CS3: Equivalence assessment for the Federal PET Diploma in Adult Education and Training	The CS presents the qualification procedure for the Federal PET Diploma in Adult Education and Training, in particular the equivalence assessment procedure. The CS is based on interviews with different stakeholders.	Many people were working as adult educators, but there was no federal recognition for the training given to them. The first need was to establish a federal diploma, then to establish qualification procedures. Two qualification procedures were launched in parallel: a traditional one, with exams, and a VNIL process (with equivalence assessment). The basic idea was to tailor the procedure to the needs of adults (i.e. people with work experience, meaning a competences-oriented procedure).
CH*	CS4 Federal PET Diploma in SME Management – Pilot project in VNIL	Reacting to a significant need for recognition and certification for women running family businesses, the Swiss Industry and Trade Association (SGV USAM) has established - a new Federal PET Diploma, specifically designed for women active in family SMEs, which can be obtained either formally or through VNIL. The VNIL process is tailored to the specific needs of candidates who have to manage businesses as well as family constraints.	Family SMEs are very important in the Swiss economy and are often led by spouses or partners who learned business management on the job. As Switzerland is also suffering from the global economic crisis, it is very important to have the skills that have been informally acquired recognised to improve competitiveness and economic growth.

	Qualification obtained after VNIL	Institutions involved and sectors concerned	Specificities of bottom-up approach (characteristics)
	Federal PET Diploma in Adult Education and Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Swiss Federation of Adult Learning (SVEB)</li> <li>CH-Q and ARRA (organisations in CH that deal with the issue of demonstrating competences)</li> </ul> <p>Third /Adult education sector</p>	The qualification procedure was created prior to the development of national guidelines for qualification procedures and was therefore a pioneering achievement. Non-governmental organisations took the initiative to launch and manage the process, including the development of tools (competency profiles and equivalence assessment portfolios).
	Federal PET Diploma in Adult Education and Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Swiss Federation of Adult Learning (SVEB)</li> <li>CH-Q and ARRA (organisations in CH that deal with the issue of demonstrating competences)</li> </ul> <p>Third /Adult education sector</p>	The qualification procedure was created prior to the development of national guidelines for qualification procedures and was therefore a pioneering achievement. Non-governmental organisations took the initiative to launch and manage the process, including the development of tools (competency profiles and equivalence assessment portfolios).
	Federal PET Diploma in SME Management (this is a new qualification that was established at tertiary level B)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Swiss Association of small and medium enterprises SGV</li> <li>Trade unions, sectoral/branch organisations, Individual workers (women active in family SMEs)</li> <li>National authorities: SERI, FOGE</li> <li>4. Training institutions: SFIVET, SIU</li> </ul>	The initiative comes from stakeholders in the workplace (trade unions and individual workers, women active in family SMEs). Inclusion of women (VNIL candidates) in the whole process (incl. development of tools) makes it possible to take into account their specific needs and constraints.



Country	Title of Case Study (CS)	Brief description	Reasons for VNIL (identified needs)
CH*	CS5  The VNIL process in SFIVET Lausanne: Genesis of a bottom-up innovation	In 2003, following a law change, SFIVET needed to train experienced teachers in the shortest possible time. The pioneer VNIL project was born, with a desire on the part of teachers to make use of their previous knowledge (formal, non-formal and informal) to accelerate access to a formal qualification. Since then, 250 candidates have passed with satisfactory results, obtaining partial or total validation.	In one of the French- speaking cantons, employment law changed, requiring all VET teachers must be certified within two years of recruitment, although many of them had already been working for several years (in some cases for more than 15 years) without training. The client took this opportunity to try out a VNIL process which could shorten the whole procedure and take into account the previous experience of the candidates.
DE	CS1  Support for a young unemployed man to find an adequate apprenticeship through assessment	The LEB Bad Zwischenahn started an assessment in the context of a European project on the integration of migrants. They have been offering this assessment for many years and are addressing not only migrants, but the young unemployed, people who want to change their profession, women going back to work etc. In the case study, a young man of Turkish background had tried to find an apprenticeship as a car mechanic without success. Through the assessment course he got confirmation of the competences he had and discovered he could widen his perspectives on his future profession. He finally found an apprenticeship as a salesman in the automobile industry.	For the individual, the assessment offers a differentiated system of support in choosing a suitable profession, an increase in personal motivation, an attempt to match the individual's competences with the labour market's requirements and further possibilities of education.
DK	CS1  Authentic Ways methodology, case of Jette	The CS presents an R&D project that aims to "address the question of transfer between learning environments". "How can educational institutions assess the competence developed outside the educational system (in the workplace)?" The method used is called "authentic ways". It reflects real-life work situations as much as possible. The CS is illustrated by the specific case of a 57- year- old woman who aims to be a qualified hospital service assistant.	In the Basic Adult Education (GVU) programme, low- skilled adults can become skilled in their fieldwork.

	Qualification obtained after VNIL	Institutions involved and sectors concerned	Specificities of bottom-up approach (characteristics)
	Vocational teacher's qualification (60 ECTS credits)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Swiss Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (SFIVET)</li> </ul>	<p>Even if the request was top-down (from the Canton de Vaud) the whole process is a bottom-up one:</p> <p>Decision to apply VNIL even if there was no legal framework at that time (hidden procedure)</p> <p>The person in charge of this mandate in SFIVET had just finished a postgraduate qualification in adult training. He was strongly influenced by the emergence of VNIL in France and by its authors. He took the opportunity to launch an innovative process with VNIL.</p> <p>The development of the whole procedure is seen as a "VNIL laboratory" and as a development process for competences.</p>
	No qualification was obtained in this case study. The trainers observations and the participant's self-evaluation provide the basis for an individual report.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The 'ländliche Erwachsenenbildung' (LEB) - an adult education institution present all over Germany</li> </ul> <p>Adult educations sector</p>	<p>The initiative to launch the process of validation through self- assessment and observation procedures was taken by a local adult education institution.</p>
	Not applicable for this CS (many qualifications may be obtained with this project)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DEL (Danish Institute for Educational Training of Vocational Teachers)</li> <li>Three vocational schools (Aarhus region)</li> <li>Regional hospitals</li> </ul> <p>Adult education / VET sectors</p>	<p>Cooperation between DEL and the vocational school, as well as institutions participating in the programme, to define or evaluate educational needs or to provide new opportunities for real-life work experience. The programme is tailored to meet the needs of adults who have work experience but few qualifications.</p>

Country	Title of Case Study (CS)	Brief description	Reasons for VNIL (identified needs)
DK	CS2  Third sector involvement in preparing for VPL – training of “sparring partners”	Denmark introduced a self-assessment tool for the clarification and documentation of competences acquired in the third sector. It became obvious that this tool would be better implemented if the procedure was supported by a ‘sparring partner’. The CS presents the training of these sparring partners for VNIL..	This is an identified need, not the reason for VNIL:  A new tool for VNIL in the third sector needed to be implemented in a reliable way by volunteer associations. There was a need for an infrastructure to provide third sector support for VPL at a local level.
DK	CS3  The involvement of the 3F union in VPL	The CS shows how the biggest trade union in Denmark, 3F, implements and encourages VNIL at a national and local level for all employees. It describes the way 3F promotes VNIL.	VNIL is seen as a good way to motivate 3F members (both skilled and unskilled workers) to undertake education in order to improve their economic situation and work mobility.
ES	CS1  Car Industry	The CS reports a six- month project focused on the accreditation of non-formal learning in the car industry in Castile and León. The case study is concentrated on a single person who aimed to have the skills that they had acquired in 16 years of working life assessed.	The car companies were very interested in the VNIL process because they needed to recognise the competences of their workers in order to validate their work and establish a flexible system of mobility among them.
NL	CS1  Fire department	Due to a legal requirement, fire- fighters in the Netherlands have to leave work after 20 years of active service in fire-fighting and risk management. For effectively helping with the second careers of these fire-fighters, the fire department developed and implemented an APL experiment to improve the mobility of departing fire workers from job to job, into a new (office) position within or outside the fire department.	Most of the target group (fire-fighters) finished secondary general education and started working in the fire department, where they were trained in-house during their service years. They needed to make their acquired competences (‘fire competences’) transparent to the outside world, to link these competences to national qualifications and to further their career opportunities.

	Qualification obtained after VNIL	Institutions involved and sectors concerned	Specificities of bottom-up approach (characteristics)
	Sparring partners (this is not a certificate obtained after VNIL; it is a training programme for local partners who will go on to guide more candidates in VNIL).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Danish Ministry of Education</li> <li>○ Danish Adult Education Association (DAEA)</li> </ul> <p>Third / Voluntary / Adult education sectors</p>	This is not a bottom-up approach because the Danish Government mainly finances it, but the result is clearly an encouragement for further bottom-up initiatives. The training of local sparring partners is a good way to include people from the bottom in cooperating with a VNIL procedure.
	The CS does not describe any particular procedure for obtaining a qualification.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 3F (national and local representatives)</li> <li>○ Local education guidance centres</li> </ul>	The CS shows that some resistance occurs at a local level, because the whole concept is too top- down. Tools and procedures seemed to be too complicated and not sufficiently concrete.
	No specific qualification was obtained in this case study.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Consultancy firm Almansur.</li> <li>○ The validation process was carried out by the companies through a training centre under the supervision of an inspectorate.</li> <li>○ Trade unions.</li> </ul> <p>Adult education sector</p>	The VNIL process was initiated by one company with support from the regional government. In order to validate the work of employees and to give them the opportunity to start a professional career, four companies participated. The multinational aspect of some companies was a further reason to make the competences of the employees transparent and comparable in order to foster mobility.
	No qualification was obtained in this CS. The APL in this case study literally means documenting, valuing and translating the personal competences and experiences to more transparent competence standards of VET and higher education. In this way, the target group could show more easily how their competences might be transferred to other working contexts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Fire Department of Dordrecht;</li> <li>○ A+O Fonds Gemeenten (= training fund for local communities and municipalities)</li> </ul> <p>Work-based learning / VET / Adult education / higher education sector</p>	

Country	Title of Case Study (CS)	Brief description	Reasons for VNIL (identified needs)
PT	CS1 Process of Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences for Baby- sitters and Educational Technical Assistants Associação Cultural Moinho da Juventude (Windmill Youth Cultural Association)	The project focuses on the recognition and validation of competences at a professional level of educational assistants, currently designated at level 3 – Educational Technical Assistant – and level 2 – Baby- sitters. The instruments developed were based on the competency framework for educational assistants in the UK. The instruments provided orientation and guidance for developing the portfolio and became a fundamental part of the process of recognition and validation of acquired experiences.	The project aimed to recognise and validate the competences that the mainly immigrant women from Cape Verde had acquired throughout their lives through non-formal and informal education, which were fundamental for them to perform their occupation as baby- sitters, for this occupation to be valued, to promote mobility and (re)employability, and to identify training needs.
SE	CS1 Validation in Vetlanda Learning Centre	The case study deals with the validation of non-formal and informal learning in the field of cooking in restaurants and large households. The vocational training, organised by municipal adult education, is based on national courses from the upper-secondary school programme, and the validation is related to these national courses. The case study is concentrated on a single person who wanted to finish her upper-secondary education and restaurant education through validation.	The VNIL path was driven by the goal to reach formal grades and finish upper- secondary level in order to get permanent employment. Another goal of the person described was to study at university.

Qualification obtained after VNIL	Institutions involved and sectors concerned	Specificities of bottom-up approach (characteristics)
<p>No qualification was obtained in this case study. The professional competences of the educational assistants at Moinho da Juventude were recognised and validated. The project was significant for developing the training and professional framework for the educational technical assistants.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Third sector, VET and adult education sector: This project, conducted by the Moinho da Juventude Cultural Association, was initiated in 1993-94 under a European project, sponsored by the NOW (New Opportunities for Women) programme, and took place at level3 – Educational Assistants, current designation Educational Technical Assistant. The project involved a set of partners from France, Belgium and the Netherlands.</li> </ul> <p>Third / VET / Adult education sector</p>	<p>The process for VNIL was initiated by a local organisation in the 1990s and served as an awareness-raising process for the Ministry of Education on the importance of training and the legal definition of the occupation of educational assistants.</p>
<p>The person in the case study completed VET through validation and further training and assessment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>VET sector: Vetlanda Learning Centre</li> <li>Municipal adult education institution.</li> <li>VET sector</li> </ul>	<p>The VNIL process was tailored to the needs of the individual through cooperation between a learning centre and an adult education institution.</p>

	Country	Title of Case Study (CS)	Brief description	Reasons for VNIL (identified needs)
17	AT	CS2: wba (Weiterbildungskademie Österreich)	wba is an institution for the recognition and accreditation of adult educators in Austria. wba sets standards and strengthens the professionalisation of adult education because it enables those taking part in its certification process to gain a qualification that is widely recognised within the profession. Practical experience in the field of adult education is a prerequisite for certification by the Academy.	Before 2007 there was no standardised system of vocational training for adult educators in Austria. The institutions involved developed and founded the wba for a variety of reasons: to set overall quality standards in the field of adult education, to develop a recognition model so that adult educators do not have to start from scratch when enrolling in a training programme, to enhance the professionalisation of adult educators, and to enable the clients to continue their education at university level.
18	CH	CS4: Federal PET Diploma in SME Management – Pilot project in VNIL	Reacting to a significant need for recognition and certification for women running family businesses, the Swiss Industry and Trade Association (SGV USAM) has established – a new Federal PET Diploma, specifically designed for women active in family SMEs, which can be obtained either formally or through VNIL. The VNIL process is tailored to the specific needs of candidates who have to manage businesses as well as family constraints.	Family SMEs are very important in the Swiss economy and are often led by spouses or partners who learned business management on the job. As Switzerland is also suffering from the global economic crisis, it is very important to have the skills that have been informally acquired recognised to improve competitiveness and economic growth.
19	CH	CS5: The VNIL process in SFIVET Lausanne: Genesis of a bottom-up innovation	In 2003, following a law change, SFIVET needed to train experienced teachers in the shortest possible time. The pioneer VNIL project was born, with a desire on the part of teachers to make use of their previous knowledge (formal, non-formal and informal) to accelerate access to a formal qualification. Since then, 250 candidates have passed with satisfactory results, obtaining partial or total validation.	In one of the French- speaking cantons, employment law changed, requiring all VET teachers must be certified within two years of recruitment, although many of them had already been working for several years (in some cases for more than 15 years) without training. The client took this opportunity to try out a VNIL process which could shorten the whole procedure and take into account the previous experience of the candidates.

Qualification obtained after VNIL	Institutions involved and sectors concerned	Specificities of bottom-up approach (characteristics)
<p>wba-certificate I: certified adult educator (status-quo evaluation, competences in educational theory, didactics, management of educational events, guidance and counselling, librarianship and information management, social competence, personal competence, elective subjects.</p> <p>wba-certificate II: graduate adult educator (four possibilities for specialisation: teaching and training, educational management, counselling, and librarianship).</p>	<p>bifeb, Federal Institute for Adult Education), also the responsible body for wba; Association of Austrian Adult Education Centres(KEBÖ; cooperative System); wba is financed by the Ministry of Education, the Arts and Culture, the ESF and clients.</p>	<p>wba takes into account the need for professionalisation; wba takes into account former experience and the non-formal learning of participants.</p>
<p>Federal PET Diploma in SME Management(this is a new qualification that was established at tertiary level B)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Swiss Association of small and medium enterprises - SGV</li> <li>2. Trade unions, sectoral/ branch organisations, Individual workers(women active in family SMEs)</li> <li>3. National authorities: SERI, FOGE</li> <li>4. Training institutions: SFIVET, SIU</li> </ol>	<p>The initiative comes from stakeholders in the workplace (trade unions and individual workers, women active in family SMEs). Inclusion of women(VNIL candidates) in the whole process (incl. development of tools) makes it possible to take into account their specific needs and constraints.</p>
<p>Vocational teacher's qualification (60 ECTS credits)</p>	<p>Swiss Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (SFIVET)</p>	<p>Even if the request was top-down (from the Canton de Vaud) the whole process is a bottom-up one:</p> <p>Decision to apply VNIL even if there was no legal framework at that time (hidden procedure)</p> <p>The person in charge of this mandate in SFIVET had just finished a postgraduate qualification in adult training. He was strongly influenced by the emergence of VNIL in France and by its authors. He took the opportunity to launch an innovative process with VNIL.</p> <p>The development of the whole procedure is seen as a "VNIL laboratory" and as a development process for competences.</p>



## 1.4 Analysis

### 1.4.1 Reasons to launch the process

This part analyses the reasons why a VNIL process has been launched. Was it the initiative of a specific group in response to identified needs? What was the main goal of launching the process (obtaining a higher degree, continuing formal education, the need for employers to identify the skills and competences of their employees, improvement of labour market mobility, immigrants being able to prove their skills, or making competences visible in order to support jobseekers, etc.)? In fact, the comparative analysis of the different case studies indicates a variety of aims and objectives of implementing VNIL process from the bottom-up.

#### Making skills and competences visible and facilitating labour market integration

Eight out of twelve case studies focused on identifying informally acquired skills and competences in order to improve labour market access for a specific target group, such as migrants, young and unskilled individuals or the unemployed. The ambitions of the processes that were initiated were to make skills and competences visible, to raise one's awareness of one's own competences and to develop these competences purposefully and with regard to the requirements of an occupation. The prime objectives were to help people within the target group to make future career choices, to fight unemployment, to enhance migrant integration or to improve career transitions. One example in this regard is case study 2 from Austria, which aimed at using the new competence portfolios for recognition at apprenticeship training offices. Likewise, case study 4 from Switzerland also aimed at recognising and valuing the hidden work and skills developed by partners of SME owners. At the same time, this example helped in improving gender equality, since in Switzerland women are underrepresented in senior management positions. The integration of migrants was particularly present in case study 2 in Switzerland, where the aim was to professionalise community interpreters, who are mostly migrants, some with a long experience as volunteers in interpreting services. Besides the need to value the experience of this group of individuals and promote their integration, there was a clear identified need from the labour market for more professionals in interpreting services, especially in health services. The latter two cases highlighted in particular the multiple impact of VNIL for raising self-awareness, self-

confidence and empowerment on the one hand and labour market opportunities on the other hand.

#### Identifying the skills and competences of employees and improving labour market mobility

Case study 5 in Switzerland was launched following a request from the Canton de Vaud, where employment law had changed and all VET teachers had to be certified with a vocational teacher's qualification within two years of being hired. Many of them had been working for 10-15 years without this specific qualification. A mandate was given to SFIVET, which is responsible for the pedagogical training of VET teachers. At the same time, there was much interest in VNIL, and this was an opportunity to start an innovative process which could satisfy the new regulations for VET teachers as recognition for years of experience. One case study (ES, CS1) focused on the accreditation of non-formal learning and work experience to increase the mobility of workers among several companies in a particular field of work. The companies needed to recognise the competences their workers had acquired in the workplace in order to validate these competences and be able to establish a flexible system of mobility among workers. Similarly, in Denmark, the biggest trade union, 3F, promoted VNIL as a way to motivate its members to build on their skills and qualifications in order to improve their mobility and income (DK, CS3).

#### Obtaining formal qualifications or higher degrees and continuing formal education

Another case study (CH, CS1) illustrated the process of completing a vocational qualification by providing the opportunity to validate informally acquired competences and former experiences in education corresponding to national courses at upper-secondary school, and to attach supplementary training. The main goal was to shorten the duration of practical and theoretical studies for the individual in second-chance education by assessing previously acquired competences. This is also the case in Denmark (CS1), with that case study presenting the "authentic ways" methodology, which focuses on real-life work situations.

Case study 3 in Switzerland focused on the need to develop a qualification for adult trainers who reflect the reality of the careers of these professionals. Thus, it was possible from the beginning to access the formal qualification in a traditional way or through a VNIL procedure. This is also the case with case study 4 in Switzerland, whereby a new Federal PET Diploma was

developed with the participation of candidates, who were matching their specific needs and constraints.

### Developing a support infrastructure for VNIL

In Denmark again, another case study (CS2) highlighted the need to develop an infrastructure to support the implementation of VNIL (and especially new tools) in the third/voluntary sector. One response was to develop a VNIL structure in this sector with the training of “sparring partners”. In Switzerland, case study 1 underlined the wish to innovate in a field which was not covered by a VNIL procedure, but which benefits from a good network of local organisations. In the Canton of Valais, in which the case study took place, there was already a good and dynamic structure for VNIL in many professions, but none for metalworkers. As there are many individuals who have been working in this profession for many years without an official qualification, this was a good opportunity to launch a VNIL procedure for them, even if this initiative was not a rehabilitative measure or a demand from the labour market.

#### 1.4.2 People or institutions involved in the process

In this section, the analysis focuses on the people or institutions involved in the process, looking into the actors initiating the process, and whether the process focuses on or is initiated by individuals or targeting groups of individuals with similar needs or experiences.

The validation processes within the 12 case studies refer mainly to the VET, adult education, third/voluntary and work-based learning sectors. Only one refers to the higher education sector (NL, CS1).

#### Initiators of bottom-up VNIL processes

The main actors initiating VNIL process with a bottom-up approach appear to be education institutions on the one hand and professional associations or employers on the other hand.

Examples of education institutions initiating VNIL processes may be found in case study 1 in Austria and case study 1 in Germany, wherein both instances adult education institutions took the initiative to launch a process for identifying informal and personal competences and strengths. The Austrian case study shows a process which was launched to develop tools for identifying the outcome of informal learning within educational guidance to make the work for educational counsellors easier. The German case study describes an assessment as a diagnostic process that enables

the participants to recognise personal strengths and weaknesses in order to support their decisions on their future profession. In Switzerland, in case study 2 and case study 3, the main adult education institution had invested a considerable amount in the procedures, as was also the case for case study 2 in Denmark. In Switzerland, associations active in VNIL helped with the portfolio methodology (CH-Q and ARRA).

For case study 5 from Switzerland, the whole process was in the hands of the Swiss Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (SFIVET). The general demand to qualify many vocational teachers in a very short time, arises from a regional authority, in this case from the Canton de Vaud. However, instead of having teachers with long-standing work experience undergo training programmes, SFIVET decided to validate their work experience through VNIL processes. In this way, every year since 2003, groups of 25-30 teachers have obtained their vocational teacher’s qualification through VNIL compared to 75, who obtained it through formal training. One Danish case (CS1) presents a joint R&D project involving the Danish Institute for Educational Training of Vocational Teachers and three vocational schools, which is supported by the Danish Ministry of Education.

Moreover, case study 1 from Sweden were driven jointly by a career counsellors and teachers with the aim of achieving VET qualifications through VNIL.

Likewise, numerous examples exist of professional organisations or employers initiating VNIL processes from the bottom-up. Case study 4 from Switzerland, for example, shows a strong initiative from stakeholders at the workplace including employers, trade unions, sectoral / branch organisations and individuals, mainly women active in family SMEs. These actors are united by the umbrella organisation for SMEs, which have a significant role in the Swiss economy. Other partners also took part, including national authorities and training organisations. Furthermore, case study 1 from Switzerland describes a common initiative of a professional organisation specifically active in construction (Canton of Valais Builders Association) and the cantonal office for career guidance.

In Spain (CS1), a VNIL project was initiated by Renault, with support from the regional government and in cooperation with a consultancy firm. Four companies in the automotive sector participated in the project. The validation process took place within the companies and was evaluated by a jury consisting of vocational

education teachers, members of the trade unions and the company's trainers.

The case study 1 in the Netherlands (CS1) indicates mechanisms for VNIL and work-based learning in the sector of VET and adult education. The process was initiated at a local institution (Fire Department of Dordrecht), and was further supported by a training fund for local communities and municipalities (A&O Fonds Gemeenten). For developing instruments of validation and accreditation at the fire department's academy, external advisors were involved.

Fewer case studies describe VNIL initiatives arising from the cooperation of voluntary organisations or trade unions.

For Switzerland (CS2) and Denmark (CS2), there is an interesting cooperation between associations active in the third / voluntary sector, adult education institutions and a Ministry. It is especially noticeable in Switzerland for case study 2, where a very complex partnership took place, although the initiator and the body in charge of the whole process was the INTERPRET association. In the same case study, we can also see the role of placement agencies, which is not so common.

In Denmark, the biggest trade union, 3F, took the initiative to launch a process (CS3) for all its members (skilled and unskilled people), and was helped by local educational guidance centres to implement the process.

In Portugal (CS1) an instrument for validating competences for educational assistants was developed by a cultural association (a private, non-profit organisation). Throughout the project, experiences with educators and educational assistants were shared with regional as well as foreign entities through interchange periods.

#### Actors addressed with bottom-up VNIL processes

While highlighting the focus on the individual in the implementation phase of VNIL processes, case studies generally appear to arise from or address common needs or experiences of groups of individuals.

Examples of that may be found in case studies 5, 4 and 2 from Switzerland, which are addressing women active in family SMEs; addressing the need for the qualification of vocational teachers; or the qualification of community interpreters. Other examples include case study 1 from the Netherlands or case study 1 from Spain, which are focused at facilitating the

labour market mobility of firefighters or employees in the automotive sector. Likewise, case study 1 from Portugal highlights the common aim of validating the competences of educational assistants to improve their labour market opportunities.

At the same time evidence also exists for VNIL processes aiming at the validation of individual competences. Case study 1 from Sweden, for example, describes an individual process of finishing VET through validation, with further training and assessment in a municipal adult education institution and a learning centre. Moreover, both case study 1 in Austria and case study 1 in Germany, are focussed on enabling individuals to recognise personal strengths and weaknesses in order to support their decisions on their future profession and facilitate their entry into the labour market. Other examples of individual approaches to VNIL include case study 1 and case study 3 from Switzerland and case study 1 from Denmark.

#### 1.4.3 Ways to launch, manage and coordinate the process

This section analyses the ways in which the bottom-up process was launched, managed and coordinated. This includes questions, such as the type of organisations or entities involved in the process; the forms of collaboration between different authorities; the support received by authorities for example in terms of finances or human resources; as well as whether the action was initiated locally or served as a pilot project.

#### The scope of and support for bottom-up VNIL processes

Regarding the ways of implementing the processes, in all cases, several organisations were involved, with one of them undertaking the leading role. Most of the case studies mentioned financial support from authorities, including from the relevant ministry (AT, CH and DK), the social welfare office (DE), labour market organisations (DK, CS3), funding from the budget of a European project (PT) or indirect funding through tax concessions (NL).

#### The design of bottom-up VNIL processes

The processes of validation or identification of informal learning differed substantially in their design. In some cases, the process of validation was a pilot one, with an objective to implement the action on a wider basis. In Austria (CS1), the project was carried out by the national umbrella organisation for voluntary educational and cultural work (ROBW), which attempted to develop,

test and implement tools for the work of educational counsellors ('competence sketch' and 'competence profile') in a pilot process. Seven counsellors from organisations with different target groups participated in the project and worked with the newly developed or adapted tools. In Denmark, case study 2 explained how people tried to implement a new tool for self-assessment in the voluntary sector by establishing a network of local "sparring partners" throughout the country. The challenge was to train the people who could train these sparring partners. Thus, a course has been organised by the Danish Association of Adult Education (DAEA) for participants at different local schools who are active in the third sector to become sparring partners themselves and to transfer their experience and competences to their specific field. The case study 1 in the Netherlands described an initial pilot process on a regional level, which has served as a trial to improve certain conditions or specific items. In a second pilot process, the instruments that had been tested were implemented on a national level. In Spain, the action was driven by the idea of improving the management of human resources and creating a model that could be extended to other vehicle factories in Spain. In Denmark, case study 1 described the GUV programme, a basic adult education programme in which low-skilled or unskilled adults could become skilled in their field of work. The methodology used within this programme was called "Authentic ways of presenting a problem or an assignment in the RPL process". The programme was tailored for adults' needs by being flexible, individually organised and making use of adults' prior learning. The training was organised in schools, as it was assumed that the adults already had work experience. A close cooperation between the vocational school and regional hospitals was established in order to define new educational needs.

In other cases, a general process of VNIL had already been implemented. Some case studies described individuals using existing ways of validation or processes and provided a picture of how these methods were adapted to individual needs (DE, SE). In Switzerland, case study 1 showed how people benefitted from an existing structure of VNIL in the VET sector and could extend it to another profession by establishing new collaborations with the local umbrella organisation in the construction sector and adaptations for the assessment of candidates.

### The coordination of and collaboration in bottom-up VNIL processes

In Switzerland, three procedures were developed in order to professionalise a group of individuals where

there were no formal qualifications matching their profiles (CS2, CS3 and CS4). In these three cases, the first step was to build a competence profile, then to set a qualification pathway. In those examples, there were two ways to obtain the qualification, one formal and the other under a VNIL procedure. In case study 2, a working group mandated by the Federal Office of Public Health analysed the need to improve interpreting services, especially within the context of increasing immigration. This initial need was the starting point that inspired a process of collaboration. For case study 4, the role of women active in family SMEs was a determining factor; they were involved in the whole process and participated in the development of the specific tools. Key stakeholders were also consulted in order to ensure that national qualification standards were met and the legal framework respected. In Denmark, the trade union 3F (CS3) launched a VNIL programme for all its members, which worked at national and local levels. At the national level, 3F functioned as a resource for counselling and initiated connections with vocational schools and labour market training centres. Local branches were free to implement the national policy. Several models of local implementation were developed and people known as "union learning representatives", "education ambassadors" or "learning angels" have been trained to be active in the workplace and to help with the implementation of the VNIL procedure. In addition, 3F, together with a local guidance centre, has worked to inform staff in job centres about the VNIL approach.

In case study 5 in Switzerland, two VNIL managers were responsible for the whole process. Besides their role in guiding and counselling candidates, they also trained the other stakeholders, including counsellors, trainers and experts who play an active part in the process. Coordination sessions with all actors in the process throughout the year made possible the transmission of knowledge. There are opportunities to improve the procedure and to increase the level of expertise among the various actors. In total, about 26 people took part in the VNIL process for 30 candidates at different stages, thus the ratio of candidates to these actors was almost one to one. Each year, a group of 25-30 candidates enters the process of VNIL. If all their competences could be validated through VNIL, they would obtain their qualification within one year (instead of 2-3 years for formal training). If candidates have gaps, they are required to join formal training, which is adapted to their specific needs. The process is designed as a group process with candidates starting and finishing together, which was identified as one of the key success factors, since in this way candidates



can support and learn from each other and exchange experiences, which further instills confidence. Four steps make up the process: 1. Information (by groups or individual); 2. Orientation and development: this stage gives the candidates the methodological skills to demonstrate their competences; 3. Assessment: this combines declarative methods and observation in four ways (a written paper, observation at the workplace, an assessment centre and an interview). Specific tools have been developed for this type of VNIL to guarantee a fair comparison between a particular candidate's experience and the general qualification framework. Evaluation is considered as a process of constructing meaning by the person being evaluated. In Portugal, the instruments that were developed for the recognition and validation of competences for educational assistants were based on the competences framework for educational assistants in the UK. The instruments served as an orientation and guidelines for the candidates to develop a competence portfolio. They became a fundamental part of the process of recognition and validation of acquired experiences. The instruments worked as an evaluation framework, which educational assistants and baby-sitters could use for self-recognition, followed by feedback from consultants and an analysis by the project's consultants in the validation phase.

#### 1.4.4 Impact and outcomes

This part focuses on the outcomes of the different case studies analysed, always with a bottom-up perspective, if possible. In particular, it raises issues of the evolution of the candidates within the bottom-up process, the possibility of developing the legal framework and/or a new qualification thanks to the process, the goal reached (certification or other) at the end and the generalisation (or not) of the process.

#### The impact of bottom-up VNIL processes at the system level

In one case (PT CS1), the initiated process had a strong influence on the training frameworks and on the professional framework for educational assistants. Through interchange periods with partners in the Netherlands, it was possible to perfect the training frameworks for educational assistance courses for immigrant women in the Netherlands. In Portugal, the group of mainly women who were involved in the process of portfolio development gained, through this process, the opportunity not only to value previously acquired knowledge, but also to reflect on their professional practices through sharing experiences and learning from each other.

In Spain (CS1), the intention of the project for accreditation of non-formal learning and experience in the car industry was to develop a general framework for automotive factories in Spain. Within the project, no new qualification was developed, rather a catalogue of qualifications that could be integrated into companies' human resource management.

In the Netherlands (CS1), the first pilot project, focusing on the validation of the acquired competences of fire-fighters, was part of a new personnel policy at the Fire Department of Dordrecht. The process was aimed at the development of a human resource strategy, with personal development as the most important issue. The second pilot project provided the opportunity for a broader pilot in several fire departments in the Netherlands. After that, the aim was a national follow-up project. The process of validation described does not contribute to a new qualification, but it appeals to existing qualifications.

As has been mentioned in other sections of this chapter, the three case studies from Switzerland (CS2, CS3 and CS4) have contributed towards the development of a new qualification, first in building the qualification profile and then in offering two paths to access the qualification, one formal and one by VNIL. This underlines the need for a tailored process (formal or non-formal) to adults' needs and to the reality of their lives. Currently, two qualifications are available for community interpreters: the certificate and the Federal PET Diploma (ISCED 5B in Switzerland). This means that the process described in case study 2 is generalised and is enhanced through the possibility of obtaining the Federal PET Diploma.

In case study 5 in Switzerland, 250 people have obtained their vocational teacher's qualification through VNIL since 2003. It is now a recognised way of obtaining the same qualification alongside the formal way, even if there is still no legal framework for this tertiary level. In the beginning, in the absence of a regulatory framework, the VNIL procedure remained 'hidden' for years behind the formal pedagogical training programme. The VNIL process gradually took hold, with much going back and forth between generating referential knowledge and establishing rules through a reflective, continuous approach. Practices and norms emerged, with mutual interaction between formal training and VNIL. It is now a well-known process, and SFIVET is known as an important stakeholder in the development of VNIL in Switzerland, but as a downside, vocational schools now prefer to send their teacher to do VNIL instead of formal training because it is cheaper and faster. Thus, SFIVET has to be very careful to avoid VNIL becoming

“just” a fast way to obtain a qualification equivalent to that obtained through formal training. For candidates, VNIL is seen as a process of development of competences; it is not only a way to demonstrate the outcomes of professional experience, but also a place to develop competences, to think and to complete their experience. For SFIVET, the impact is also very important; there is an open exchange between the formal curriculum and the VNIL process. Stakeholders who are active in the VNIL process are also active in the formal process, so they transfer knowledge, experience and competences from one to another. In fact, the VNIL process has had an impact on formal training, leading to changes in SFIVET instructor practices. This permeability benefits both systems (formal and non-formal). Thus, the VNIL process is seen as a learning place for all actors (candidates and stakeholders) and is constantly re-examined. It is a dynamic process and a co-construction between candidates and the other actors.

In Denmark, the outcome of case study 1 was a range of descriptions of “authentic problems” that could be used in the VNIL process in relation to these four areas of vocational education: office clerk / administration, service assistant, media graphics designer and catering assistant. Jette, the candidate presented in this case, was following the procedure to become a skilled service assistant by getting her basic adult education qualification. The “authentic problems” method made it possible to “overcome some of the difficulties regarding transfer between sectors and [...] build a high level of consciousness [...] and addresses the challenge of verbalising tacit knowledge” (DK CS 1, p. 10). This case contributed to the development of the conceptual framework of VNIL, in searching for means to fill the gap between training and real-life work.

### The outcome of bottom-up VNIL processes

In the case studies from Austria (CS1) and Germany (CS1), the processes described had no influence on the development of the legal framework or on a new qualification. In Austria, the outcome of the project was a tool (‘competence sketch’, ‘competence profile’) that could be used by educational counsellors to identify informally acquired competences. The German case described the process of an assessment for individuals, with the outcome of an individual report that includes personal strengths and talents. In the case study, a young man had problems finding an apprenticeship position. After the assessment, his skills and talents were confirmed, and he found a company where he could start his apprenticeship training in a different occupation.

The case study in Sweden (CS1) described a case where the participant has been able to complete secondary education through the VNIL process and supplementary training. The opportunity for validation was very important for the participant in order to get permanent employment.

The interviewed applicant in the case study 1 from Spain was seeking to start a professional career and was interested in having the skills that he had acquired through his 16 years of working life assessed.

Case study 2 from Switzerland revealed some very interesting results, including the significant number of community interpreting qualifications delivered (317 certifications delivered through a VNIL procedure; 40 candidates obtained a partial qualification). For the candidates themselves, it has been a way to have their competences recognised officially and to enter the job market in Switzerland. It was clearly a good opportunity for their integration, economically as well as on a social and personal level.

Case study 4 in Switzerland is currently in the pilot phase, and 15 women active in family SMEs are now engaged in the process, but 50 to 100 candidates have shown interest and could engage later. Also, there is a huge number of potential candidates, because the number of family SMEs in Switzerland is high, and due to the fact that this is a newly recognised profession, which was in the shadows before. As regards outcomes, it is also worth mentioning the development of specific tools (qualification profile, validation self-assessment tool) and the support and coaching system that has been specially designed to fit the specific needs and constraints of the candidates. A large amount of work has been done to train those who guide and assess the candidates.

### The consolidation of bottom-up VNIL processes through the development of a support infrastructure

In order to sustain impact and outcomes of bottom-up VNIL process a robust support infrastructure is indispensable. In this regard, the result of case study 2 in Denmark was the establishment of an ambassador group for VNIL at a local level, especially for the third sector associations, which are mainly run by volunteers. These people were then able to train “sparring partners” in order to help to implement VNIL. The focus was on the use of the self-assessment tool developed by the Danish Ministry of Education, which seems to be implemented in an effective and structured way, thanks to the implication of the third-sector structure at a local level. The impact of case study 3 in Denmark

is not entirely clear, which may be due to the fact that the project was still ongoing at the time of writing. The interesting feature is how the 3F union has been trying to implement VNIL in local branches, what the difficulties have been and what resistance has been encountered. In Switzerland, case study 1 described particularly how a bottom-up process has been developed with interactions between a professional organisation active in the construction sector (the Canton of Valais Builders Association) and the cantonal guidance office. It showed the negotiation process between all the relevant actors, especially regarding the assessment of candidates, whereby various organisations had differing ideas about what should be used as evidence. However, despite those different points of view regarding the assessment tools, the procedure was considered a success for all involved. They all agreed on the fact that the professional experience of the candidates is valuable and that it should be recognised officially. For the candidate interviewed for this case study, it is interesting to note that he entered this process only to have his professional experience valued. He already had a good job and did not need further qualifications. He saw the whole process as a training, even if he already knew a large part of the contents of the qualification profile.

## 1.5 Discussion & conclusions

This chapter shall conclude the findings regarding the bottom-up approach that have been made so far. Moreover, some key success factors and difficulties arising from the analysis of the selected case studies are presented.

### 1.5.1 Success factors

Bottom-up VNIL processes are often sparked by impulses from individuals and/or organisations that eventually lead to the establishment of networks and partnerships involving all possible stakeholders. Based on these networks and partnerships, marketing and communication activities to spread the idea and principles of VNIL appear to be important. Moreover, it seems to be crucial that information is shared in a clear and transparent fashion; that ownership of all actors involved is ensured and that roles and tasks (leader, coordinator, financial and political support, scientific expertise, political/institutional endorsement) within the bottom-up - VNIL - initiative are transparent and communication is maintained continuously between all actors involved throughout the entire process.

Other success factors identified especially in the national stakeholders' fora are:

- When VNIL is built into public policy (e.g. return to work), it becomes a regular part of the formal system.
- It should be an integral part of the bottom-up VNIL processes to seek consensus and cohesion at every stage of the process.
- The objectives and motivations of potential applicants are known, recognised and taken into account.
- The experience of individuals (in the study of practices, analysis, inspiration, and readjustment) is taken into account as an advantage. Experiences between VNIL stakeholders (including candidates) is shared, since bringing together areas with different levels of progress and experience with VNIL is useful as it allows the participants to learn from one another, since it reduces isolation and re-injects dynamism into the process.
- Regulations and laws are crucial to stabilise and secure the bottom-up process in order to insure the sustainability and transferability of VNIL processes and procedures.
- National "validation of non-formal and informal learning" guidelines and tools might help the implementation of VNIL procedures.
- A flexible framework might foster innovative local initiatives.
- "Speaking the same language" (i.e. mutual understanding and definition of terminology, creating a glossary).

### 1.5.2 Difficulties & constraints

In a bottom-up approach, the heterogeneity of practices can lead to a fragmented and non-cohesive range of experiences. Thus, a lack of political will to manage a legal or organised framework will keep the situation as initial without taking advantage of different practices' richness. At the same time, too many regulations hinder local and creative initiatives. Another difficulty might be the generalisation of local, singular and specific bottom-up experiences.

### 1.5.3 General conclusion

In general, it can be said that bottom-up processes can question, influence or destabilise existing systems, such as legal or educational frameworks, and they can even lead to establishing new certifications. But these potential new certification processes lead to the fact that bottom-up processes never stay bottom-up processes for a long time. Instead, bottom-up processes may serve as 'initiators' to start - for example - new certification processes in the field of VNIL. The same could be said for top-down processes. So, bottom-up and top-down processes can hardly be separated from each other; in a way, they are related to each other and build a dynamic and circular system.

But why do certain bottom-up processes come up in the field of VNIL? The previously described case studies illustrated reasons such as the value of competences for (re)entering the labour market, increasing labour market mobility, shortened training programmes and legal constraints in the formal education system. Most of the organisations and people involved in bottom-up VNIL processes were from the field of adult education, professional organisations, trade unions or associations active in the third /voluntary sector. Sometimes even schools and ministries were actively involved in the bottom-up processes which illustrates the fact that bottom-up is a transversal and circular process with back and forth between top and down.



## 02 New professions – competence profiles of VNIL professions

By Kirsten Aagaard

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the competence profile of the VNIL profession with the aim of increasing transparency of and interest in the profession and outlining career progression opportunities for current VNIL practitioners. During the last 15 years, validation of prior learning has become an important focus in Europe's progress towards a knowledge society. As validation of prior learning in many ways differs from validating formal, educational knowledge, and also encompasses different stages and different tasks, it appears to have given rise to the emergence of a new profession, or maybe new professions, that address the various stages and aspects that constitutes the professional field of validating prior learning. This chapter aims to contribute information on the emerging competence profiles for VNIL practitioners.

### 2.2 Data used for analysis

The analysis of the competence profile of VNIL practitioners in this chapter is based on the following sources of information:

- Various guidelines, describing the roles and competences required for VNIL practitioners
- The state of the art in various European countries as described in the OBSERVAL – case database<sup>4</sup> and based on country reports in the European Inventory 2010<sup>5</sup>.
- Cases submitted to the OBSERVAL-NET for the Validation Prize 2013

- Other cases about competence development for VNIL practitioners (see section 4)

Section 3 describes the roles and competences of VNIL professionals based on the European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning (CEDEFOP 2009). Section 4 describes the actual competence level of practitioners and how competence development issues are handled in different European countries according to data from the OBSERVAL – case database. In section 5 data from country reports in the European Inventory 2010 are incorporated and in section 6 new cases and initiatives are described. Section 7 summarizes the findings, and points out challenges and perspectives.

### 2.3 Who are the VNIL professionals?

The recognition and validation practices of non-formal and informal learning, encompasses a wide variety of regulations and practices (CEDEFOP 2009). Based on the European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning VNIL professionals, also referred to as validation practitioners, cover all aspects of VNIL and their role may be differentiated into five distinct groups as outlined below (CEDEFOP 2009: 66ff).

<sup>4</sup> [www.observeucen.eu/](http://www.observeucen.eu/)

<sup>5</sup> European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/about-cedefop/projects/validation-of-non-formal-and-informal-learning/european-inventory.aspx>

Counsellor/ Advisors	Offer information, advice and guidance
Assessors	Carry out assessment processes
Managers	Manage assessment centres / processes
External observers	Perform quality checks in VNIL processes, training of VNIL practitioners or outcomes of candidates
Stakeholders	Hold an interest in and support VNIL processes without being directly involved in it

For all those five groups of VNIL professionals, the European guidelines suggest a list of competences, required to fulfill their specific roles. These specific requirements underscore the distinctiveness of each role, and also that those different roles are related to the specific third way in the educational system (VNIL) and not as such encompassed by the conventional roles of professionals in the system. This is further confirmed by the suggestion in the European guidelines for a common training programme for assessors, which for example encompasses an understanding of VNIL, APL or portfolio assessment, and thus differs for example from the role and tasks of counsellors.

The specific role of counsellors, for example, is their independence from the actual assessment process for an individual and their ability to offer impartial but useful advice. In order to perform this function counsellors should have:

- a thorough knowledge of the education system (orientation);

- a thorough knowledge of the validation process (information);
- an understanding of the labour market (expected standards and post assessment advice);
- a list of contacts (experts) to answer specific technical questions (social partners and other sector experts). (Guidelines 67)

In comparison, the assessor's job is to seek and review evidence of the individuals learning and judge what meets or does not meet specific standards. For this reason they should be:

- familiar with the validation process (validity and reliability);
- have no personal interest in the validation outcome (to guarantee impartiality and avoid conflicts of interest);
- be familiar with different assessment methodologies;

- be able to inspire trust and to create a proper psychological setting for the candidates;
- be committed to provide feedback on the match between learning outcomes and validation standards/references (via support systems);
- be trained in assessment and validation processes and be knowledgeable about quality assurance mechanisms.

In order to meet these specific requirements VNIL practitioners need particular competences, that may be divided into professional or formal competences, such as diplomas or certificates, and 'soft' skills that could be confirmed by interviews. Taking the example of assessors, the following professional competences or 'soft' skills may be formulated as such specific requirements.

<b>Professional competences</b>	Basic qualifications for the context of the assessment
	The qualification of the assessor is at least at the same level as that of the assessed
	Proof of continuing development of professional competences for a given number of years
	A given number of years of experience in the occupational area, sector or branch of the occupation to be assessed
	Broad experiences in the occupation or sector; knowledge of the occupational standards in use are more important than specialisation
<b>Soft skills</b>	Basic communication skills
	Supportive, caring and empathic attitudes
	Broad-minded, self-reflective personality
	Positive attitude towards recognition
	Intrinsic motivation to be an assessor

## 2.4 What do we know about VNIL practitioners?

In this section, actual roles and competences of VNIL practitioners are presented as they are described in the case studies in the OBSERVAL database. The case studies refer to vocational education and training (VET), higher education (HE), adult education (AE); the public sector, the private (profit) sector and the so-called 3rd sector or non-profit sector. The cases do not mainly focus on competence development. In most cases competence development is a subtheme. VNIL professions were tagged with regard to identification and description of roles of professionals. The identification was followed by the analysis of these case studies. The main findings of this analysis are summarized in the end of this section.

## 2.4.1 Competences of counsellors and advisors

Country	Brief description	VNIL practitioner involved	Specific competences	Institutions involved and sectors concerned
AT	»DU kannst was!« (»YOU are able to do something!«) is a pilot project for validation of professional competences acquired in informal and non-formal learning	Advisers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adult educators experienced in portfolio work;</li> <li>Ability to work together with assessors in the portfolio development.</li> </ul>	<p>EB Forum (Erwachsenen bildungsforum Oberösterreich – Adult Education Forum Upper Austria)</p> <p>VET / Adult Education / third sector</p>
AT	Counsellors in recognition of formal, non-formal and informal learning of adult educators (counsellors, educational managers, teachers/trainers, librarians)	Counsellors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Experienced professionals in adult education;</li> <li>Knowledge of the adult education system and scene in Austria;</li> <li>Administrative skills and accuracy and communication skills.</li> </ul>	<p>Academy of Continuing Education (Weiterbildungsakademie – wba) in Vienna</p> <p>Adult Education / third sector</p>
AT	Counsellors in the »Informal Competence Acquisition and Educational Guidance« project – a sub-project within an Austrian project on educational guidance	Counsellors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Skills and competences linked to the newly developed or adapted tools from the »competence portfolio for volunteers«, one of Austria's first competence portfolios for showing results of informal learning.</li> </ul>	<p>Ring Österreichischer Bildungswerke (RÖBW, a platform of Austrian Adult Education Associations)</p> <p>Adult Education / third sector</p>
BE	»Valorisation des acquis de l'expérience« (VAE) in Belgian French speaking universities, that means the recognition of former non-formal, informal or even formal learning in order to admit to a master degree a student who has not graduated as a bachelor of an equivalent subject	Counsellors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Capacity to receive the VAE candidate and to build a relationship based on mutual trust with him/her;</li> <li>Ability to express the story of a professional career in terms of competences which can be compared to the requirements of a specific curriculum;</li> <li>Understanding the different master degrees and their specific requirements;</li> <li>Judicial and financial competences; Communication and negotiation skills</li> </ul>	<p>Belgian French speaking universities</p> <p>Higher education sector</p>

Country	Brief description	VNIL practitioner involved	Specific competences	Institutions involved and sectors concerned
DK	In the case "Sparring partners" a person supports a candidate seeking validation of prior learning through probing and enhancing self-assessment. These sparring partners are teachers and counsellors from the non-formal adult educational schools trained by the Danish Adult Education Association (DSF) to become guides/ mentors for future sparring partners across the third sector.	Teachers and counsellors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Competence to support a candidate seeking validation of prior learning through probing and enhancing self-assessment</li> <li>Guides/ mentors for future sparring partners</li> </ul>	Danish Adult Education Association (DSF) third sector
DK	Trade Union learning representatives/ "education ambassadors"/ "learning angels" are being trained to be active in the work places. 3F works together with the local educational guidance centres and 3F inform the staff of the job centres about their approach to validation of prior learning. A major challenge is "to make sure the local staff of 3F is prepared and upgraded for the task of clarification of competences and guidance.	learning representatives/ "education ambassadors"/ "learning angels"		local educational guidance centres job centres Trade Union – 3F third sector
EE	Counsellors in the accreditation of prior and experiential learning (APEL) at the University of Tartu	Counsellors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>At least 4-year university education;</li> <li>Experience with APEL</li> <li>Ability to work together with APEL advisers.</li> </ul>	University of Tartu Higher education sector

Country	Brief description	VNIL practitioner involved	Specific competences	Institutions involved and sectors concerned
EE	APEL adviser at the University of Tartu	Adviser	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Higher education qualification;</li> <li>Experience with APEL</li> <li>Knowledge of APEL regulations of the University'</li> <li>Knowledge of the curricula of the University Tartu and other Universities</li> <li>Ability to clarify expectations and motivation of the candidate,</li> <li>Ability to help clarify procedural and other questions,</li> <li>Ability to assist the candidate to make the best choices, but leaves making the final decision to the candidate as well as collecting of the needed evidence and other materials);</li> <li>Ability to work together with APEL counsellors and assessors.</li> </ul>	University of Tartu  Higher education sector
FR	»Valorisation des acquis de l'expérience« (VAE) - Employment agencies dealing with jobseekers in the Paris region involved in a formal partnership with the University of Paris 13 to design guidance and counselling training and guidelines.	Counsellors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Knowledge of guidance and counselling training and guidelines.</li> </ul>	University of Paris 13  ANPE (Agence Nationale pour l'Emploi – National Employment/ Work Agency)  VET / Higher education sector
PT	Advisers in the process of recognition, validation and certification of competences developed in new opportunities centres	Advisers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Higher education qualification in humanities and social sciences</li> <li>(In part) work experience in adult education as trainers and professional orientation advisers;</li> <li>Competence to work as animators, educators or monitors.</li> </ul>	ESDIME, Fundação Alentejo and Centro de Formação Profissional de Portalegre  Adult Education / third sector

Country	Brief description	VNIL practitioner involved	Specific competences	Institutions involved and sectors concerned
RO	Counsellors in the validation of non-formal learning for the qualification of trainer in adult education within the regular national validation system	Counsellors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Formal qualification, certificates</li> <li>Professional experience</li> </ul>	<p>Regular national validation system</p> <p>VET / Adult Education / third sector</p>
SL	Advisers in the assessment and recognition of national vocational qualifications in accordance with the National Vocational Qualification Act or the so-called certification system	Advisers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Professional experience</li> <li>Qualification based on special training programmes;</li> <li>Competence to work as advisers, counsellors, motivators.</li> </ul>	<p>Formal certification system</p> <p>VET sector</p>
SE	Advisers in the »Validus« project – a project concerning validation of trade union occupational knowledge acquired through work-place learning in higher education, driven in cooperation between Linköping University, Lund University and the national trade unions called Kommunal and ST (The Union of Civil Servants)	Advisers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support of the candidate throughout the validation process;</li> <li>Cooperation with teachers – coordinators of courses related to the validation process of the candidate – in creating tools such as questionnaires etc.</li> </ul>	<p>Linköping University Lund University</p> <p>The national trade unions called Kommunal and ST (The Union of Civil Servants)</p> <p>Higher education / third sector</p>
SE	A teacher at Örebro University participated in a course of the CityAcademy for teachers in need of competence development concerning work with validation. The case demonstrates what can be achieved in competence recognition and accreditation with a well-planned strategy to engage in staff development and in collaborative initiatives at local or regional level.	Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Competences obtained from a course for teachers in need of competence development concerning work with validation</li> </ul>	Municipality Örebro
SE	<p>The case highlights the role of the advisers/tutors and the importance of personal interaction in trust building between candidates and the tutors.</p> <p>The assessment decides the result of the validation and depends a lot on the approach of the course coordinator concerning the definition of knowledge. It is important that the teacher/course coordinator is open to other cultures of knowledge and willing to recognise the knowledge a candidate has acquired and relate this knowledge to academic knowledge.</p>	Advisers/tutors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Importance of personal interaction in trust building between candidates and the tutors.</li> </ul>	TU Occupational knowledge

## 2.4.2 Competences of assessors

Country	Brief description	VNIL practitioner involved	Specific competences	Institutions involved and sectors concerned
AT	»DU kannst was!« (»YOU are able to do something!«) is a pilot project for validation of professional competences acquired in informal and non-formal learning	Assessors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Experience in assessment;</li> <li>Ability to work together with assessors in the portfolio development.</li> </ul>	<p>EB Forum (Erwachsenenbildungsforum Oberösterreich – Adult Education Forum Upper Austria)</p> <p>VET / Adult Education / third sector</p>
AT	Evaluators in recognition of formal, non-formal and informal learning of adult educators (counsellors, educational managers, teachers/trainers, librarians)	Evaluators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Formal certification through a workshop (which, after the status-quo evaluation, all candidates must attend) or at graduate level</li> <li>Experienced professionals in adult education, educational management, teaching/training, library and information management, leaders of institutions of adult education and members of the so-called cooperative system</li> <li>Knowledge of the adult education system and scene in Austria;</li> <li>Administrative skills and accuracy and communication skills.</li> </ul>	<p>Academy of Continuing Education (Weiterbildungsakademie – wba) in Vienna</p> <p>Federal Institute for Adult Education (Bundesinstitut für Erwachsenenbildung – bifeb)</p> <p>Adult Education / third sector</p>
BG	Evaluators in the validation of key competences in the field of ICT, entrepreneurship, soft skills, performed by the DVV-International, Bulgaria (German Adult Education Association, office in Bulgaria) / Bulgarian Adult Education Association (BAEA)	Evaluators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Qualification in economics</li> <li>Specific training to carry out the role of evaluators</li> </ul>	<p>DVV-International, Bulgaria (German Adult Education Association, office in Bulgaria)</p> <p>Bulgarian Adult Education Association (BAEA)</p> <p>VET / Adult Education / third sector</p>
CZ	Examiners in the validation within the UNIV project in the Czech Republic and provided by the Secondary Technical School of Fishery in Trebon	Examiners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Professional experience as teachers of professional subjects at the Secondary Technical School of Fishery</li> </ul>	<p>Technical School of Fishery in Trebon</p> <p>VET sector</p>



Country	Brief description	VNIL practitioner involved	Specific competences	Institutions involved and sectors concerned
EE	Assessors in the accreditation of prior and experimental learning (APEL) at the University of Tartu	Assessors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ higher education qualification;</li> <li>○ Experience with APEL;</li> <li>○ Knowledge of APEL regulations of the University'</li> <li>○ Knowledge of the curricula of the University Tartu and other Universities</li> <li>○ Ability to clarify expectations and motivation of the candidate,</li> <li>○ Ability to assess given evidence in accordance with the learning outcomes of the curriculum,</li> <li>○ Ability to give necessary and helpful feedback;</li> <li>○ Ability to work together with APEL counsellors and advisers.</li> </ul>	University of Tartu  Higher education sector
FI	Assessors in the Finnish competence based qualification system  The sectorial Qualification Committee defines the requirements of the assessors (they vary between qualifications, but normally, e.g. at least 5 years of work experience in the sector in question, qualifications etc.) The schools are required to provide assessor training to the chosen assessors.	Assessors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ At least 5 years of work experience in the sector in question.</li> </ul>	Competence based qualification system  VET sector
LU	Assessors in the process of validation of non-formal, informal learning at the Chamber of private employees	Assessors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Skills and competences linked to learning by doing.</li> </ul>	Chamber of private employees  VET sector

Country	Brief description	VNIL practitioner involved	Specific competences	Institutions involved and sectors concerned
NO	Assessors in the formal recognition and accreditation of non-formal and informal learning	Assessors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Specialist skills in the subject in which the assessment will be carried out;</li> <li>○ Knowledge of curricula;</li> <li>○ Knowledge of the philosophy behind the assessment of non-formal learning in particular;</li> <li>○ Knowledge of various methods and tools which can be used in the assessment of non-formal learning;</li> <li>○ A positive attitude towards the assessment of non-formal learning;</li> <li>○ Training in the assessment of non-formal learning.</li> </ul>	<p>formal recognition and accreditation of non-formal and informal learning</p> <p>Adult Education / third sector</p>
NO	The surveys revealed a major need for training: Around 96 per cent of the supervisors and 85 per cent of the assessors/ specialists feel that they need training in the future, particularly in relation to a quality assurance arrangement which may lead to a national standard. In upper secondary education, the recognition process is organised in the local county council "Skill/service Centres".	Assessors	<p>The assessors need to have the following expertise to be able to carry out the work:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Knowledge and understanding of how to communicate skills in the workplace and third sector</li> <li>○ Specialist skills in the subject/subjects in which the assessment will be carried out</li> <li>○ A good knowledge of curricula, their content and structure</li> <li>○ A knowledge of the philosophy behind the assessment of non-formal learning in particular, with emphasis on equivalent competence</li> <li>○ A knowledge of various methods and tools which can be used in the work on the assessment of non-formal learning</li> <li>○ A positive attitude towards the assessment of non-formal learning</li> <li>○ Undergone training in the assessment of non-formal learning</li> </ul>	Formal recognition
RO	Evaluators in the validation of non-formal learning for the qualification of trainer in adult education within the regular national validation system	Evaluators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Professional experience and certificates.</li> </ul>	<p>regular national validation system</p> <p>VET / Adult education / third sector</p>

### 2.4.3 Findings from the OBSERVAL Cases

The cases above illustrate that in practice the focus appears to be limited to two of the roles of the VNIL professional, namely the role as counsellor or advisor and the role as assessor. The cases also suggested that counsellors or advisors and assessors were often not trained or lacked formal competences as VNIL professionals. Instead they appeared to be mainly recruited among adult educators and teachers. That suggests a general perception that (adult) teaching experiences seem to be regarded as qualifying for undertaking task of counseling as well as assessing. At the same time the cases highlighted the need of and outlined required competences in counseling as well as assessment. In particular, the following competences were mentioned:

Counsellor/ Advisors	Assessors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▫ Be able to establish relations</li> <li>▫ Understanding career learning and development</li> <li>▫ Knowledge of the educational system</li> <li>▫ Communication skills</li> <li>▫ Negotiation skills</li> <li>▫ Higher education</li> <li>▫ Knowledge of the rules of VNIL</li> <li>▫ Knowledge of curricula</li> <li>▫ Be able to clarify expectations/motivation</li> <li>▫ Cultural competences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▫ Knowledge of the rules of VNIL</li> <li>▫ Knowledge of curricula</li> <li>▫ Knowledge of the philosophy behind VNIL</li> <li>▫ Knowledge of different assessment methodologies</li> <li>▫ Training</li> <li>▫ Cooperation skills (with Counsellors/guiders)</li> </ul>

With respect to the various roles of VNIL professionals outlined above based on the European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning, but also the intrinsic understanding revealed in the OBSERVAL-cases, it appears highly problematic that in practice work experience as an adult educator seems to be one of the requirements for undertaking validation of non-formal and informal learning. This is problematic insofar as the European guidelines and the competences arising from the analysis of the case studies point to very specific competences related to the different roles of the VNIL practitioners and these may not

necessarily be achieved during training or working as adult-educators.

### 2.5 What do we know about the education provided for VNIL practitioners?

In addition to the case studies outlined in the previous section, information on the education provided to VNIL practitioners has been obtained from country reports in the European Inventory on VNIL for the year 2010 (CEDEFOP 2010). This information has been further supplemented by data collected based on a questionnaire sent to all partner countries of the OBSERVAL-NET project. The data from the European Inventory are reported below together with the additional information from the questionnaire.

## 2.5.1 Data from the European Inventory and the questionnaire

Country	Information from European Inventory 2010	Additional information from the questionnaire
AT	<p>The practitioners of portfolio methods are trainers at adult education institutes who have proven expertise in the field of adult education and underwent the respective special training.</p> <p>The platform of Austrian Adult Education Associations (Ring Österreichischer Bildungswerke), for example, offers a training course which leads to a certificate of portfolio tutoring. To gain this certificate, a prospective portfolio tutor needs to participate successfully in 4 training modules, develop a portfolio for himself/herself as well as 5 additional portfolios. During this process, he/ she is professionally supported and the timeframe is flexible. Portfolio tutors have both knowledge of how to develop a portfolio and knowledge about volunteering and associated human resources policy.</p>	<p>There is no separate VNIL profession in Austria. As VNIL plays a minor role within the Austrian education system, there is no overall VNIL system or strategy. But there are several examples and initiatives regarding VNIL going on.</p> <p>There is no special training (qualification) for VNIL professions practitioners, but from time to time there are workshops at the Austrian Federal Institute for Adult Education (Bundesinstitut für Erwachsenenbildung - bifeb).</p> <p>See for example:</p> <p><a href="http://www.bifeb.at/index.php?id=527">http://www.bifeb.at/index.php?id=527</a></p> <p><a href="http://www.bifeb.at/fileadmin/Aida_Documents/Detailprogramme/2012/Programm%20LLL%20Akkreditieren%20und%20Zertifizierung%20in%20der%20EB.pdf">http://www.bifeb.at/fileadmin/Aida_Documents/Detailprogramme/2012/Programm%20LLL%20Akkreditieren%20und%20Zertifizierung%20in%20der%20EB.pdf</a></p>
BE (fl)	<p>EVC (Erkenning van Verworven Competenties – Recognition of Acquired Competences) assessors in higher education must be evaluation experts (with a minimum of one year of experience in evaluation) and experts in the occupation they are assessing.</p> <p>Also EVC assessors for the certificate for vocational experience must be evaluation experts (with a minimum of one year of experience in evaluation) and experts in the occupation they are assessing.</p>	

Country	Information from European Inventory 2010	Additional information from the questionnaire
BE (fr)	<p>Validation practitioners are examiners and observers.</p> <p>Examiners are employed by a Validation Centre and must fulfil the following criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ be a trainer or teacher of the occupation concerned by the validation;</li> <li>○ belong to one of five public institutions members of the Skills Validation Consortium (Consortium de Validation des Compétences) or a network of Validation Centres, or</li> <li>○ have five years of experience in the occupation concerned by the validation, not having left the occupation for more than five years.</li> </ul> <p>Observers are appointed by a Validation Centre and must fulfil the following criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ be professionals in the occupation concerned by the validation;</li> <li>○ have five years of experience in the occupation concerned by the validation, not having left the occupation for more than five years;</li> <li>○ not have any personal links to the candidate for validation.</li> </ul> <p>The training for the examiners is provided by an expert from the Skills Validation Consortium. This training lasts for one day and covers issues such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ the concept of validation</li> <li>○ the role of the evaluator and how to use competence standards</li> <li>○ the assessment process</li> <li>○ how to provide guidance and support to candidates for validation.</li> </ul> <p>The training for the observers is carried out by the Validation Centre manager or the person responsible for validation.</p>	
CZ	<p>Validation practitioners must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ be either a qualified education professional or experienced adult educator or have passed a specific preparation course for recognition of non-formal and informal learning and work with adults (12 hours of courses);</li> <li>○ have basic competences in working with computers and the internet.</li> </ul>	

Country	Information from European Inventory 2010	Additional information from the questionnaire
DK	<p>Validation practitioners must be educated practitioners from the educational institutions working in assessment and recognition. There are a number of different initiatives for development of validation practitioners' competences. The Ministry of Education took initiatives in the vocational area and in the third sector. Some national umbrella organizations provide courses for local facilitators of the three third sector tools. The National Knowledge Centre for Validation of Prior Learning organized several seminars, courses and conferences. Initiatives have been taken to develop a more systematic education for validation practitioners. The National Knowledge Centre for Validation of Prior Learning has developed at the medium-cycle post-secondary adult education programme (Aagaard &amp; Enggaard).</p>	
EE	<p>RPL (Recognition of Prior Learning) practitioners in higher education are assessors and counsellors. There are training courses for these practitioners, provided by RPL trainers who are joined in the network and are RPL practitioners themselves.</p> <p>The assessors training course, for example, has the following learning outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ understanding the nature and principles of validation;</li> <li>○ linking experiential learning theory and the basic features of validation;</li> <li>○ understanding the validation process (actors, the sequence of activities, responsibilities, etc.);</li> <li>○ knowing how to describe and analyze their own previous learning;</li> <li>○ comprehensive understanding of outcomes-based assessment;</li> <li>○ knowledge about the key evaluation methods and criteria for validation;</li> <li>○ the ability to assess applications and provide constructive feedback.</li> </ul>	

Country	Information from European Inventory 2010	Additional information from the questionnaire
FI	<p>There are three assessors in competence-based qualifications, namely an employer representative, an employee representative and a representative of the training provider. The latter must be a qualified assessor and must hold a qualification as a Specialist in Competence-based Qualifications.</p> <p>The training for this qualification lasts about one year and is offered by five Finnish polytechnics. It comprises of three compulsory courses and two elective subjects of which students must choose one. Compulsory courses include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Principles of the competence-based qualification system</li> <li>○ Organisation of competence-based qualifications, and planning and individualisation of assessments</li> <li>○ Organisation of assessments and evaluation of vocational skills.</li> </ul> <p>Elective subjects include management of the competence-based qualification system and development of the quality of competence-based qualifications.</p> <p>The other two assessors (employee and employer representatives) must have a good, thorough understanding of the assessment process. This is ensured by the training provider who familiarises them with this process before the assessment takes place.</p> <p>Training providers also organise training courses/days for prospective assessors. Such courses are being run across the country in VET institutes, workplaces and even as online courses.</p> <p>Besides that, there are also other requirements placed on assessors. First, assessors must be motivated to be involved in the assessment process and are expected to be able and willing to take time to prepare themselves for each assessment and provide feedback. Second, assessors must have ensured that their own skills and competences regarding their profession are up-to-date (i.e. they are aware of legal changes affecting their profession). Third, assessors must be able to accept and tolerate people from different backgrounds and their different working practices/methods to carry out the tasks in question. Fourth, assessors must ensure to be impartial in the validation process and therefore must therefore not be related to the person undergoing validation that could have an impact (positive or negative) on the assessment.</p>	
DE	<p>Validation practitioners in the External students' examination must be competent in all relevant fields of examination.</p> <p>Validation practitioners in higher education must have the respective professional background.</p> <p>ProfilPASS-counsellors must have either a formal qualification in the field of counselling or vocational experience connected with further education in the field of counselling. They also must undertake special training. This training lasts over two days and consists of the development and philosophy of THE ProfilPASS-System, recording and developing competences and developing course scenarios. There are also continuous information meetings for the exchange of experiences with a thematic focus on local, regional or national level offered by dialogue-centres and the national service-centre.</p>	



Country	Information from European Inventory 2010	Additional information from the questionnaire
IS	<p>Validation practitioners are assessors, counsellors and project managers.</p> <p>The project manager is a person who has experience and knowledge within the field of Lifelong Learning and project management.</p> <p>The counsellor/adviser is a careers guidance practitioner in a Lifelong Learning Centre or at an Upper Secondary School who has a diploma or a Master degree in Educational and Vocational Counselling.</p> <p>The assessor is a specialist in the profession at hand. They can be teachers in Upper Secondary Schools, but they can also be professionals from working life. In addition to professional knowledge, the assessor must have a positive mindset towards the concept of validation, good communication skills and experience and knowledge of evaluation methods and training. Also they have to have credibility and impartiality and the ability to assess aptitude.</p> <p>A non-obligatory training for project managers, assessors and counsellors/advisers is offered by the Education and Training Service Centre. It is a two day course where the concept and practices are reviewed and discussed. The subjects in the course are for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Recognition of prior learning</li> <li>○ The validation process</li> <li>○ The role and competences of the assessor, counsellor/adviser, project manager</li> <li>○ Quality issues.</li> </ul>	
IE	Validation practitioners in the higher education sector are academic staff.	
IT	<p>Validation practitioners are education/training or vocational guidance professionals who are used to managing competence curricula and training programmes and are also skilled in delivering services to individuals.</p> <p>Within the two projects, the Regional experiences and the Libretto Formativo, there was training for the validation operators that consisted of 2-5 days of intensive classroom training and further e-learning. The training was mostly on the validation framework, the correct use of the procedure and tools and some practical examples.</p>	

Country	Information from European Inventory 2010	Additional information from the questionnaire
LT	<p>Validation practitioners, for example, at the Centre of Career and Competence of Vytautas Magnus University and at the Mykolas Romeris University are university teachers. There are trainings, seminars, workshops, conferences as well as guidebooks for validation practitioners.</p> <p>In the project »Developing the System of Evaluation of Knowledge and Competence in VET« (funded by the EU Structural Funds in 2005–2007), the competences of assessors dealing with validation of non-formal and informal learning were defined for the first time. There are the following groups of these competences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Preparation for the validation process</li> <li>○ Preparation of the validation process</li> <li>○ Organization and implementation of the assessment process</li> <li>○ Improvement of validation process</li> <li>○ Assessor's professional and individual development.</li> </ul>	

Country	Information from European Inventory 2010	Additional information from the questionnaire
LU	<p>Validation practitioners shall be professionals with a thorough knowledge of the skills and competences required in the labour market for a given occupation and that may be acquired through education and training.</p>	<p>There are two different types of practitioners, those who guide people through the process of analyzing and describing their experience (advisors/counsellors), and those who analyse and evaluate the dossier of the candidate against the diploma/certificate reference (assessors/evaluators). These have to meet different competences.</p> <p>Advisors/counsellors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Knowledge of the education and training system including the certifications;</li> <li>○ Knowledge of the legal texts and regulations concerning the validation process</li> <li>○ Familiarity with the assessment practices</li> <li>○ Ability to adapt its practice to best support the candidate</li> <li>○ Master the required interview techniques in the field of validation</li> </ul> <p>Assessors/evaluators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Be a professional in his or her trade</li> <li>○ Setting up a grid (related to the specific certification) bridging the requirements of the diploma and the described experience of the candidate</li> <li>○ Translating the experience of the candidate into the competences of the certification.</li> </ul> <p>Both groups of practitioners have to be professionals in their field (guidance counsellors and professionals of the trade), Their training is especially focused on the specific knowledge, skills and competences in relation to the validation process. In a first phase the training was provided by experts in the field of validation (research and training) of the University of Nancy/Strasbourg, who accompanied the first validations.</p> <p>Now the training is provided by those people that have gained the experience in the meantime. These people have the advantage that they have the competences to train the new people by combining the theoretical issue with their concrete experience.</p>

Country	Information from European Inventory 2010	Additional information from the questionnaire
NL	<p>Validation practitioners are: assessors; portfolio-guides; developers/advisors (who develop/advise on the development of APL procedures; teacher-trainers (trainers of assessors and portfolio-guides). All of them are professionals and receive training from official APL providers. This training delivers on the following criteria validation practitioners must meet:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Understanding of the key concepts and benefits of APL (and also when applicable of RPL);</li> <li>○ Reviewing and analysing models of recognition and accreditation of prior learning;</li> <li>○ Analysing and developing the skills, knowledge and processes required to support APL practice;</li> <li>○ Understanding and application of the APL process;</li> <li>○ Reflection on the impact of APL on their professional learning, practice and their educational setting;</li> <li>○ Understanding of the organisation, management and marketing of APL.</li> </ul>	
NO	<p>Assessors at regional validation assessment centres tend to have a background in the relevant education or trade. They may be teachers of or people working in the relevant trade who have a good knowledge of the course curriculum which is being assessed.</p> <p>Assessors in higher education are academic staff.</p> <p>Validation guidance practitioners may be careers counsellors or teachers for example.</p> <p>The training of professionals is the responsibility of their employer. Training is provided regularly, depending on training needs.</p>	<p>Professional skills, curriculum skills and communication skills are generally required for practicing in this line of work. However, there are no set requirements.</p> <p>The training, its content, organization and provision, is in the responsibility of the employers of these professionals. There are no formal, national requirements as mentioned above. If the practitioner is a qualified teacher, for example, no extra qualifications are required.</p>
PT	<p>RVCC (Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences) professionals must have a degree in an area of the social sciences.</p> <p>Training for practitioners of the New Opportunities Centres is organised annually by NANQ (National Agency for Qualifications), in cooperation with, amongst others, higher education institutions, the National Centre for Training of Trainers - IEFPP, the Ministry of Education and centres for continuing education of schools. Continuing training is also organized by New Opportunities Centres themselves, in the form of seminars, conferences or meetings.</p>	

Country	Information from European Inventory 2010	Additional information from the questionnaire
RO	<p>The assessor of professional competences must be a specialist with up-to-date experience of work and/or coordination in the professional area which the centres have assigned to him/her for assessment. The qualification of an evaluator is at NQF level 4 / EQF level 6.</p> <p>The certification is carried out by CNFP, the national competent authority in this field, according to the requirements of the occupational standard of an »evaluator of professional competences«, based on the following competence units:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Planning and organization of validation</li> <li>○ Recording and reporting of validation results</li> <li>○ Carrying out assessment/evaluation</li> <li>○ Elaboration of assessment/evaluation instruments</li> <li>○ Information analysis and decisions making regarding identified competences</li> <li>○ Internal verification of validation processes</li> <li>○ External verification of validation processes.</li> </ul> <p>There is initial and continuing training of validation practitioners by the validation centres. The process of validation and certification of validation practitioners usually takes one month and is free of charge.</p>	
SL	<p>Validation practitioners should be professionals with knowledge of vocational competences, educational and training programs and they should know processes of verification and validation of knowledge and skills.</p> <p>Counsellors on the system of national vocational qualifications must undertake additional training. This training is given by the National Institute for Vocational Education and Training of Slovenia (NIVET) and counsellors have to pass an examination.</p> <p>Also members of the validation of national vocational qualifications commissions must undertake additional training. This training lasts for one day and is given by the Slovenian Institute for Adult Education. To enter to this training, the candidates must have also a license for a member of a commission (obtained in special training).</p>	

Country	Information from European Inventory 2010	Additional information from the questionnaire
ES	<p>The validation practitioners can act as advisers or evaluators. They must undergo specific training to understand the validation process and their responsibilities in it. To enter this training they must be experienced professionals as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ at least 4 years of experience as secondary and/or VET teachers, specialized in the competence to be validated;</li> <li>○ at least 4 years of experience as trainers specialized in the competence to be validated;</li> <li>○ at least 4 years of experience as professional experts in the competence to be validated.</li> </ul> <p>This training is provided by the central government and is carried out together with the National Distance Learning University (Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia - UNED) through the university's e-learning platform. The trainees must undergo a test to become validation practitioners.</p>	
SE	<p>Practitioners in the initial or possibly the first two steps of the validation process have to be career and guidance counsellors within adult education, or the employment service.</p> <p>In order to be able to make assessments of an individual's knowledge, skills or competences in a certain trade or subject, more in depth knowledge in that specific area is needed. In this part of a validation process teachers or professionals within that specific area are involved.</p> <p>Some key providers of validation have developed their own training and support to their practitioners. A few courses within higher education, primarily targeting guidance counsellors, also exist.</p>	
UK (en)	<p>The validation practitioners are existing staff members within the organization undertaking validation processes.</p> <p>Assessors in higher education must be members of the academic staff, with relevant subject-knowledge of the course in question and associated learning outcomes.</p> <p>Likewise, advisers must be members of the academic staff.</p> <p>There is training in the framework of the Diploma to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector qualification – an optional unit at level 3 on RPL (Recognition of Prior Learning). It was developed through the European Recognition of Prior Learning Outcomes (RPLO) project.</p> <p>Training in higher education is provided with the help of guidance materials related to AP(E)L. Some higher education institutions also provide training in the form of development sessions or access to an expert practitioner for support.</p>	

Country	Information from European Inventory 2010	Additional information from the questionnaire
UK (scot)	<p>At the UHI Millennium Institute, three distinct roles are identified in relation to the RPL process, namely the administrator, the adviser and the assessor.</p> <p>Training for validation practitioners is provided with the help of a RPL toolkit developed by the SCQF (Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework) Partnership. The Quality Assurance Agency for Scotland has also developed a »Flexible Entry Staff Development Pack« for higher education personnel. A number of Universities have developed RPL guidelines for staff, which tend to be based on the principles set out in the SCQF RPL guidelines.</p>	

## 2.5.2 Findings from the European Inventory and the questionnaire

The main findings from the data contained in the European Inventory and the questionnaire are that VNIL professionals are mainly counsellors and assessors. Counsellors are often career guidance professionals or teachers of adult education in education institutions that offer validation. Ifs validation is provided from independent organizations the VNIL professionals are also recruited from education institutions. Assessors in higher education are generally academic staff, while assessors in vocational training are generally educated practitioners, both of which have practical experience in the respective occupational fields.

Only few countries, such as Romania, report formal requirements for VNIL professionals. However, there seems to be more formal requirements for assessors than for counsellors. Special training in the field of VNIL is mainly offered in relation to VNIL projects and/ or as short courses (one or two days), seminars and conferences. The education provided in the different countries varies from almost no courses, mentorships, short courses to longer courses with formal certification. Few countries offer formal education, that mean with certification, in the field of validation.

In this sense the VNIL profession is more a practice than a profession so far. While various educational activities are reported in the field of VNIL, these are, as mentioned above, mainly organized as short courses and seminars.

The content of the courses and seminars vary. Nevertheless, the following subjects are mentioned in the country reports above:

- • Understanding the nature and principles of validation
- • The validation process - planning

- The role of the counsellor / assessor
- Guidance (counsellors)
- experiential learning theory
- How to use competence based standards / principles of competence based qualifications (assessors)
- Legal texts (counsellors)
- How to give feedback
- Tools in assessment (knowledge and development of them)
- Interview techniques
- How to develop a portfolio
- Quality issues
- Basic competences in working with IT / computers
- Marketing

These subjects are broadly in line with the recommendations from the European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning (CEDEFOP 2009) and are probably in many cases inspired by these guidelines.

## 2.6 New cases - inspirations

In this section we present 4 new cases from respectively Finland, Denmark, Switzerland and Austria. The cases were submitted to the OBSERVATION Network during spring 2013 as part of the Validation Prize 2013. The Validation prize is an award given to the most innovative and promising initiatives in the area of Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning (VNIL) in all sectors and levels of education in Europe. In this



context the cases should be regarded as inspirations to work more systematically with the development of competences among validation professionals in the future. In addition to these cases two other initiatives are included as potential sources of inspiration regarding competence development of VNIL professionals.

### 2.6.1 Finland – Validation and Valuation of Learning Expert Training

The Finnish case is a Validation Expert training program for VNIL professionals in 2011 and 2012.

This Validation Expert Training is a training program for stakeholders involved in validation processes. The target group of the training consists of staff in vocational education and training, higher education and liberal adult education with the program being targeted at professionals working at different stages of and in different roles in the validation process. In Finland several Teacher Training Colleges have provided a mandatory training for Finnish VET professionals, namely as a Specialist in Competence Based Qualifications. However, this program focuses only on the adult VET system and provides a relatively narrow view on validation of non-formal and informal learning.

The Validation Expert Training program was developed in order to shed light on the European aspect and policy outlines of VNIL, taking into account legislative reform in Finland related to the NOF and ECVET and also to enable the Finnish VNIL providers to gain a deeper knowledge and understanding of the scope of VNIL.

The training program consists of five modules:

- Information on VNIL,
- European frames of reference (EQF, NOF, ECVET and other tools),
- Quality in VNIL,

- Competences of an assessor in the VNIL process and
- Competences of an advisor in the VNIL process.

The duration of the program is 20 hours altogether. The modules are described in terms of learning outcomes and delivered based on blended learning. In addition to classroom teaching, participants have access to an e-learning environment, where additional materials and materials and directions for distance learning are provided. The e-learning environment consists of video-introductions to each module, introductory texts to each topic, a library with links to further learning, the assignments as well as a feedback form. The platform can be used independently and is freely available on the Internet.<sup>6</sup> In order to support the sustainability of the program, assignments are incorporated in the training program that focus on the development of a learning outcome based curriculum either based on an existing training program, or a new program. Moreover, participants are asked to develop a concrete ECVET implementation plan for their organizations/units.

Over 1000 participants have either taken part in the entire course or participated in individual modules. The training has been held in eight different cities and, thus, enabled participants from all over the country to participate in it. The course has also been held in Russia.

In the OBSERVAL-NET report it is stated that two regional organizations have amended their pedagogical strategy as a result of the training program, and that several organizations have started development projects with regard to quality in validation. The program, therefore, appears to have had a substantial impact on validation practices in Finland.

### 2.6.2 Denmark – Prior learning guides in the Day Folk High School

The Day Folk High School is part of DSF, the national umbrella organization for non-

<sup>6</sup> [www.aottmestari.fi](http://www.aottmestari.fi)

formal adult learning in Denmark. The 33 members are national organizations representing a broad variety of interests and providing lifelong learning via a broad range of activities, themes and subject matters. The Association of Day Folk High Schools comprises 20 local schools. These 20 schools employ approximately 300 teachers and guidance counsellors. The case represents a training program for teachers and guidance counsellors, who are trained as 'prior learning guides'. The training is organized by DSF.

The learning outcomes of the course are formulated as enabling the participants:

- To work with guidance and counseling in relation to the process of clarification and documentation of prior learning based on the latest research
- To use tools for clarification and documentation of prior learning including the tools developed by the Ministry of Education (especially for the third sector: non-formal adult education, voluntary associations and voluntary work)
- To teach and support others in how to work in a professional way as a 'prior learning guide' (sparring partner) with regard to clarification and documentation of third sector prior learning.

The course consisted of:

- 2 days of introduction,
- student activity (hands-on phase with assignments, projects and learning points),
- 1 day of presentation of research in the field and of practical examples / role play on how to act as sparring partner
- Student activity (hands-on phase with assignment, projects and learning points)
- 1 day of presentations from representatives from the formal educational system and from the labour market.

As a working tool for clarification and mapping of competences in the third sector, the Danish Ministry of Education in 2005 initiated the development of a web-based competence mapping tool. This tool was in many ways demanding to use, especially for low-skilled people, and this has called for innovative approaches to the mapping process. To meet this demand DSF developed a set of competence cards, which were based on the

structure and content of the web-based mapping tool.

The purpose of establishing a corps of 'prior learning guides' is to support the target group in order to acknowledge, identify and describe competences. The aim of the training, therefore, is to enable the prior 'learning guides to help participants in the non-formal learning sector to clarify, verbalize and document their prior learning.

Through the training and follow-up program and activities the 'prior learning guides' learn from each other's experiences, develop and test different methods, including ways of using the competence cards. In this process the cards are developed into a strong and versatile tool for clarification and verbalization of prior learning. The focus in this case is on Day Folk High Schools because a relatively large number of staff members from this type of school were trained as 'prior learning guides'.

The courses comprises of a mix of presentation, critical reflections, exercises and training through role-play. At the end of the courses the teachers and guidance counsellors achieve a 'new profession' as 'prior learning guide', and make clarification and documentation of prior learning part of their daily work.

A year after completing the courses, the guides meet and share experiences from their work as 'prior learning guides'. In a bottom-up approach they discuss and develop approaches and methods, primarily using the competence cards based on the third sector web-based tool. They add new potentials to the clarification work, especially in relation to vulnerable participants in the Day Folk High Schools. The competence cards are used in creative and different ways adjusted to the situation, for example as a narrative approach or to make different learning styles visible.

Thus, the case both underlines the importance of support or guidance in the process of clarifying and verbalizing competences, and also points to the need of developing methodologies and tools that are adjusted to different target groups. The materials for competence development of professionals in the non-formal sector as well as the competence card are available on the Danish webpage of DSF.<sup>7</sup>

### 2.6.3 Switzerland – VALIDO Project: Training specialists in a trans-border area

The Swiss case refers to cross-fertilization between the development of VNIL practices in Switzerland

and emerging needs related to the implementation of such system in Italy, particularly in the Lombardy Region. The focus was on how valuation and validation of informal and non-formal learning could be implemented in a trans-border region characterized by high levels of international mobility of workers by building mutual trust between actors belonging to diverse learning cultures. The case study focused on the reliability and validity of qualification and assessment strategies and targeted specifically VET teachers and trainers, in particular those active in VNIL processes.

The aim of the VALIDO project<sup>8</sup> was to develop a shared approach to recognition and validation of informal and non-formal learning outcomes, in order to improve matching between supply and demand, and transparency of qualifications in a regional trans-border jobmarket. The project was to jointly define qualification profiles and assessment procedures and to develop a training focused on methodologies, practices and tools for validating prior learning involving 15 counsellors and advisers of partner institutions active in Switzerland and in Italy. Situated at 'Tertiary B level', between EQF levels 5 and 6, the training was piloted with the 15 learners, delivering a recognized certification, based on a memorandum of understanding between the partners, including the award of ECVET credit points valid to complete a qualification on both sides of the border.

VALIDO is based on an existing postgraduate qualification developed by the Swiss Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (SFIVET) and structured on a modular qualification path. The reference profile, at the basis of the modular path, distinguishes between general characteristics or core competences related to the profession and competences related to the following three areas in the RVPL process:

- a) Advice and guidance
- b) Assessment Methodologies and roles

#### c) Design and Management

Considering core competences and specializations of RVPL professionals, the SFIVET Model defines 7 areas:

1. **Interaction and collaboration:** Interacting and cooperation with institutions and professionals directly or indirectly involved in RVPL procedures.
2. **Management of different communicative situations:** Managing communication related to information, promotion, monitoring and assessment in RVPL.
3. **Use, development and adaption of support documents and tool:** Selection, use, adaption and/or development of support documents and tools useful to the different phases of RVPL procedures.
4. **Identification of matching competences, skills and qualifications:** Identifying matching competences, skills and qualifications of the concerned people and the characteristics of recognised qualifications and trainings.
5. **Design and management of evaluation situations:** Managing, developing and providing advice and coordination for the VPL assessment.
6. **Advice and support:** Advising and supporting the audience interested in developing RVPL validation projects and implementation of necessary files.
7. **Organization and management of RVPL procedures:** Managing and/or designing partial or complete validation procedures considering the required quality principles.

This modular qualification path leads to the acquisition of a broad range of competences belonging to these areas, allowing for the acquisition of partial

<sup>7</sup> [www.dfs.dk](http://www.dfs.dk)

<sup>8</sup> Bednarz & Salini (in press); Salini & Bednarz 2010

qualifications focusing on accompaniment and assessment or a full qualification, namely the Diploma of Advanced Studies as RVPL specialist, corresponding to a global amount of 30 ECTS credits, within a maximum of six semesters of learning.

Experiences from the VALIDO project show that in a context characterized by an important regional trans-border mobility of the workforce, recognition and validation procedures can find an ideal field to grow. In this case drivers have been found both at a political level, based on a bilateral agreement between Switzerland and the European Union concerning the freedom of movement of the workforce, and in new methodologies and tools improving the transparency of qualifications and mobility, such as the EQF, ECVET or the European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning. The VALIDO experience also provided evidence of how a learning outcomes approach can facilitate mutual understanding.

#### 2.6.4 Austria – Recognition of Competences of Adult Educators in Austria and Beyond

The Austrian case is not per se about competence development of VNIL professionals. The main focus is on the use of VNIL to give recognition and accreditation to adult educators, including professionals working with VNIL. There is no standardized formal education for adult educators in Austria, such as trainers, advisors/counsellors, educational managers and librarians, so there was a mutual understanding that a means of qualification was needed.

The organization offering validation is the Weiterbildungsakademie Österreich (WBA), the Austrian Academy for Continuing Education. WBA sets standards and strengthens the professionalization of adult education, because it enables those taking part in its certification process to gain a qualification widely recognized within the profession. The aims of WBA are:

- To acknowledge the formally but also non-formally and informally acquired competences of adult educators according to defined standards.
- To support the transparency between adult education, university education and continuing education.
- To continuously contribute to the professionalization and the increased quality of adult education and adult educators.

The core competences in the WBA curricula, which also form the basis for recognition, are:

- Educational theory skills
- Didactic skills
- Management skills
- Counseling/guidance skills
- Competence in librarianship and information management
- Social skills
- Personal skills
- Compulsory optional modules, such as foreign languages, ICT skills or more in-depth knowledge of the above mentioned skills

Further requirements are attendance at the certification workshop and 500 hours of practical experience, which is equivalent to at least one year.

The recognition work is based on the European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning (CEDEFOP 2009), which enhances transparency and trust in the work carried out by WBA with regard to VNIL. WBA does not offer education itself but accredits suitable further education. Competence development in this case thus takes place through recognition and accreditation of formal, non-formal and informal competences.

#### 2.6.5 ALLinHE – Assessor Training Manual

The European Union funded project 'ALLinHE', which is implemented between October 2011 and May 2014, focuses on linking Validation of Prior Learning (VPL) to a practical strategy for social inclusion of underrepresented and non-traditional target groups in higher education. The aim of the project is to strengthen or develop and implement VNIL or VPL as a multi-targeted approach for empowering and integrating underrepresented groups. This is to be achieved by using VPL for guidance by increasing the transparency of their opportunities in higher education. Moreover, the project is to contribute to strengthening VPL as an innovative methodology for making universities more accessible and adapted to lifelong learning-needs of all European Union citizens.

One product of the ALLinHE project is an assessor training manual, which is a guideline for setting up national contextualized trainings for the assessors.

The manual consists of 4 sections:

- Requirements for the trainer of the assessors
- Assessors Training
- The training sessions
- Conditions

The competences suggested for assessors are the following:

- Reviewing
- Observing
- Interviewing
- Providing feedback
- Written communication
- Technical competence

These competences are elaborated in the manual. The manual describes a modularized training programme for assessors, and also suggests a required time frame for assessors to complete the programme. Furthermore it encompasses the roles and competences required to be an assessor trainer and the roles and competences required for them.

#### 2.6.6 Diploma module "Realkompetence" (VNIL), National Qualification Frame 6, 10 ECTS, Denmark

In Denmark VNIL has been on the agenda in higher education up to Master levels since 2007, and the need for a competence development for VNIL practitioners has been part of this agenda. In 2011 the National Knowledge Center of VNIL, NVR, was asked to develop and describe a module in the formal Diploma Programme. The module was approved in the formal educational system. Now the University Colleges can offer the module. The module is described below.

Target group: Employees in educational institutions who work with VPL, e.g. counsellors, teachers, coordinators and managers. Other target groups could be counsellors at Job Centers, youth counsellors, counsellors in unions and the third sector.

Admission requirements: a short-cycle higher or medium-cycle higher education and a minimum of 2 years of relevant vocational experience. Applicants with other and equivalent background may gain admittance through VPL.

Objective of the course: The student will through integration of experience from practice and theoretical knowledge gain competences to undertake and develop tasks concerning VPL in all phases of the VPL process including tasks across educations and sectors.

The student will gain:

- Knowledge of validation of prior learning as an extended road to competence development (VPL as part of a national and international lifelong learning strategy; The Danish educational system and cooperation between educational institutions; Phases and processes in working with VPL including knowledge of methods and tools for recognition, documentation and validation of prior learning; Target groups and the perspective of the individual; Quality assurance and the institutional anchoring)
- Knowledge of advantages, problems and challenges in VPL
- Skills in reflecting upon circumstances and matters of significance for working with VPL
- Skills in assessing, substantiating and utilizing various methods and tools for recognition, documentation, and validation of prior learning
- Skills in working with quality assurance of VPL processes in an institutional context
- Skills in acting in a cooperation between educational institutions and between education and work places
- Skills in developing own practice integrating theory
- Abilities to develop own practice with theoretical reflection on practice
- Abilities to support the client in his or her personal and vocational development

Content of the course:

- VPL as part of a national and international strategy for lifelong learning and education



- The educational systems and cooperation with the labour market
- Target groups and the individual's perspective, adult living and career development, lifelong learning, motivation for development and VPL
- Methods and tools for recognition, identification, documentation and validation of prior learning
- Quality assurance, validity and reliability and developmental work with VPL
- Theories on knowledge and learning

This Diploma module seems to be the only formal educational offer in the field of competence development for VNIL practitioners.

## 2.7 Summary of the findings, challenges and perspectives

One major challenge regarding the different VNIL professions outlined in section 3 of this chapter is to develop and describe them as distinct professions with professional standards. Although VNIL is linked to formal education, the philosophy, practices and tasks of VNIL differ from it. In this regard, the data discussed in this chapter appear to highlight the need for formal educational offers that meet this particular need of VNIL practitioners. VNIL is organized differently in the European countries. While it appears to be embedded in the educational system in some countries, it appears to be within the responsibility of independent bodies or labour market institutions in others. Still the main philosophy of VNIL as well as the challenges and tasks of VNIL professionals appear to be generally the same. In this respect it would make sense to develop a common educational offer across the European countries, and also to aim at developing formal requirements for professionals working with VNIL. As there seems to be in practice two main categories of professionals, counsellors and assessors, there is primarily a need for developing educational requirements and offers for those two professional categories.

The review of reports, guidelines, cases and practices from the different countries show that validation practitioners cover all aspects of validation as outlined in the European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning, namely:

- offer information, advice and guidance
- carry out assessment
- the external observers of the process
- the managers of assessment centers/ procedures
- and a range of other stakeholders that have an important but less direct role in the validation process (CEDEFOP 2009: 66 ff)

The cases and descriptions from practice also show that counsellors and assessors are in focus when it comes to the development of competences. It is, however, important to bear in mind that these five groups do not operate in isolation, but that collaboration between them is important. Many of the practitioners working in the field of VNIL have many tasks besides VNIL, and this condition makes it difficult to speak of VNIL as a distinct new profession. In this sense it is more adequate at the moment to describe VNIL as a practice.

The work of VNIL practitioners is essential for the quality and trust in the outcomes of the validation process. In policy statements and policy papers competence development for the practitioners are in focus.<sup>9</sup> But based on the above-mentioned material/cases, it seems that in practice competence development so far can be characterized as project based, sporadic and in-formal. As has been stated in the introduction a new profession or maybe professions might be emerging, but the development of these new professions through learning activities and education have to be supported by development projects and research to ensure both an experimental and systematic approach to attain competence development and professionalization of VNIL practitioners.

<sup>9</sup> European Council 2012

## 03 Work-based competence development and recognition

By Ruud Duvekot

### 3.1 Introduction

Work-based competence development and recognition can be defined as the learning that is intentionally or unintentionally taking place while working and that can be validated in a VNIL process. As has been suggested in the previous chapter, VNIL processes appear to be initiated mainly from the stakeholders 'in the workplace', namely employers, trade unions, sector / branch organisations, training funds, professional groups or individual workers. Other stakeholders, such as national, regional or local authorities and education and training providers appear to be generally involved in the provision or facilitation of agreed learning objectives.

### 3.2 Defining work-based competence development

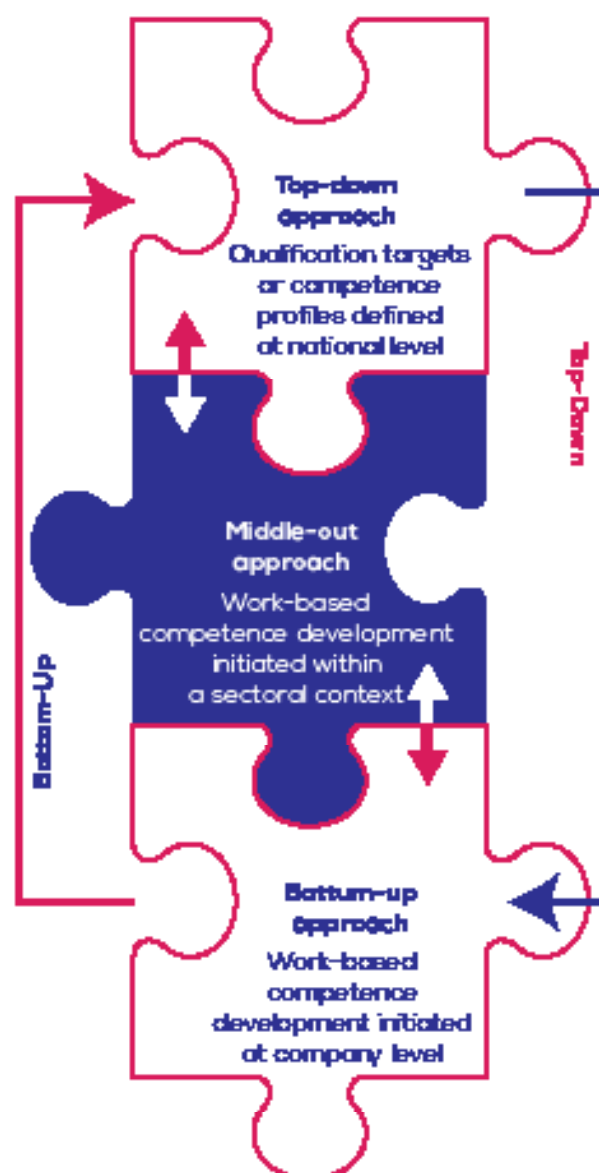
Work-based competence development and recognition combined with the application of VNIL may be characterised by the following:

1. It refers to initiatives within companies, organisations and sectors to value and validate non-formal and informal learning outcomes in the workplace.
2. It encompasses all kinds of working settings, including the for profit, not-for-profit and voluntary sectors.
3. It focuses on a diversity of goals, such as the acquisition of qualifications, whether they are national, sector or company specific; the promotion of horizontal and vertical employability and / or personal development.

Work-based competence development may be initiated within a sector and in this regard represents a 'middle-out' approach, influencing both bottom-up as well as top-down initiatives. It can, however, also be based on a bottom-up initiative at company-

level, influencing both middle-out as well as top-down initiatives. The case of a top-down initiative might also occur when the government, for instance, defines specific qualification standards which have to be respected by a company or sector.

The diagram below illustrates this complex relationship between the different levels with regard to their influence on work-based competence development:





Based on these considerations, this chapter aims to:

1. Analyse how different stakeholders formulate and manage competence profiles.
2. Analyse how different stakeholders interact and collaborate to launch and to conduct the necessary process to achieve the agreed competence profiles.
3. Analyse the role of these initiatives in the implementation of VNIL and their contribution to the development of lifelong learning strategies.
4. Analyse the specific role that the individual worker has in this process.

### 3.3 Data used for analysis

In this chapter both old and new case studies of work-based competence development and recognition are presented and analysed. The old case studies, amounting in total to 10 cases from different sectors and countries, were retrieved from the 'observatory' established as a result of the Leonardo project OBSERVAL.<sup>2</sup> The new case studies were collected in the call for nominations for the EU VNIL-prize 2013 in the category work-based competence development and recognition. The three additional case studies obtained in this way further enhance the analysis of practices existing in this area.

### 3.4 Analysis of the 'old' cases

The individual case studies were reviewed and assessed with regard to their bottom-

up character and their overall design, based on the criteria and indicators set out below.

#### 3.4.1 Methodology

Criteria and indicators applied to assess the bottom-up character of the case study

The scores on the bottom-up character were based on an assessment of each case with regard to the following indicators. The scores ranged between 1 and 5 and for each indicator levelled as follows:

<sup>2</sup> [www.observeleucen.eu/](http://www.observeleucen.eu/)

Indicator	Points to score
1 Who takes the initiative for articulating learning goals? employer (or employer-union) manager in the organisation employee (or trade-union) teacher (or school/university) providers or learning advisor (intermediary) authority (national/regional/local) other .....	3 4 5 2 1 0 1-5
2 Who takes the initiative for a focus on VNIL? employer (or employer-union) manager in the organisation employee (or trade-union) teacher (or school/university) learning advisor (intermediary) authority (national/regional/local) other .....	3 4 5 2 1 0 1-5
3 Has the approach for learning goals and the application of VNIL a short-term or long-term effect? Short- term Long-term	2 5
4 Is the process of development supported by : school/university professional groups training fund authorities tax facilities other: .....	3 2 2 1 1 1-5
5 Is the action a local one or a regional/sector action? Local Regional Sector	5 3 3
6 Has the action stimulated a structural innovation of work-based competence development and recognition? Only incidental Partly structural Overall structural	1 3 5
7 Has the action contributed to develop a formal/legal framework in which VNIL has a structural role? yes	2
8 Has the action stimulated a pro-active role of the employee? Yes	5
9 Has the impact been supported (financially, HR,...) by authorities? Yes Explanation	2 1-3
10 In which phases did the employee take an active role: formulating learning goals filling in a portfolio formulating learning activities aiming at a qualification aiming at development ' in the job' the actual learning strategy after VNIL turning the action into a lifelong learning-strategy	5 5 5 3 3 3 2

## Criteria applied to assess overall design of the case study

The scores on the overall design of the case study were applied based on the following criteria:

Criteria	Score
Professional groups, local organisations, executing institutions or providers reacted to identified learning needs.	1-5
The process of work-based competence development and recognition is driven by professional groups, local organisations, institutions or certain providers.	1-5
Professional groups, local organisations, executing institutions or providers took the initiative to launch the process in the described project (case-study).	1-5
Professional groups, local organisations, executing institutions or providers collaborate in the project.	1-5
The action in the project has an innovating influence on the traditional structure of cooperation/collaboration/initiative.	1-5
'The voice of the individual learner' is recognised/acknowledged as a stakeholder/co-producer in the process of work-based competence development and recognition.	1-5

Case studies were marked and ordered based on the quantitative scores achieved with regard to both their bottom-up character and overall design. This acted as a kind of benchmark of the main similarities and differences between the cases. The critical success factors for enhancing work-based learning that were supported by VNIL, were derived from this benchmark. A qualitative analysis complementing and supporting this assessment is presented in section 5 of this chapter. The final part of this chapter presents the overall conclusions concerning VNIL in work-based competence development and recognition.

### 3.4.2 Quantitative analysis of the 'old' cases

The scores of the 'old cases' according to the above explicated score lists, were as follows:

Cases	bottom-up character											tagging criteria							av.I +av.II	Rank
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	av. I*	a	b	c	d	e	f	av. II		
Netherlands: fire department	8	4	5	9	4	5	2	5	0	13	5,5	5	5	5	5	4	4	4,7	10,2	1
Iceland: banking	3	3	5	7	3	5	2	5	3	16	5,2	5	4	5	5	3	4	4,3	9,5	2
Italy: context A	4	2	5	7	6	3	2	5	0	16	5	5	5	5	5	3	3	4,3	9,3	3
Netherlands: scouting	3	3	5	8	3	5	2	5	3	10	4,7	5	4	5	5	4	3	4,3	9	4
Sweden: workplace learning	2	2	5	4	5	5	2	5	3	9	4,2	5	5	5	5	3	3	4,3	8,5	5
Spain: car industry	3	4	5	4	6	0	2	3	3	6	3,6	5	5	5	5	3	2	4,2	7,8	6
Italy: tourism	0	2	5	4	6	0	2	3	2	11	3,5	4	3	3	3	3	2	3,0	6,5	7
Italy: tourism	7	7	2	3	3	0	2	5	0	10	3,9	3	2	3	2	2	3	2,5	6,4	8
Sweden: LIU	3	3	5	3	3	0	0	5	2	8	3,2	4	4	2	2	3	1	2,7	5,9	9
Luxembourg: Chamber	3	3	5	3	3	0	0	5	2	8	3,2	4	4	2	2	3	1	2,7	5,9	9
Sweden: industrial sector	4	0	5	2	3	0	0	0	0	0	1,4	3	3	2	2	0	0	1,7	3,1	10

\* av = average

Looking at the ranking it is clear that the first 6 of the 10 'old cases' are of special interest to the analysis of work-based competence development and recognition as defined in the second section of this chapter. These 6 'old' cases demonstrate a variety of (lifelong) learning objectives when it comes to designing and applying VNIL; a broad stakeholder involvement with different stakeholder-constellations, a diversity in partnership financing and contributions to the bottom-up process from authorities and other 'indirect' stakeholders, and diverse issues of ownership of VNIL and learning strategies.

### 3.4.3 Qualitative analysis of the 'old' cases

When analysing the cases based on the above-mentioned assessment criteria, a number of observations can be made in support of the quantitative analysis in the previous section.

The 1st criterion focuses on identifying and acknowledging the learning needs of the workers. In nearly all cases this acknowledgement is present from at least one or two professional groups, local organisations, executing institutions or providers (cases 7, 8, 9, 10) to more than two. This shows that

VNIL is not only aimed at linking individual learning needs to objectives of raising the employability of individuals at the workplace. It also shows that VNIL is also aimed at the creation of a dialogue on learning objectives with more than just the traditional partners in lifelong learning, namely the worker, the employer and a school / training institute. This aspect is more or less confirmed by criterion 4.

When linking this observation to criterion 5, which focuses on the innovative potential of the case studies with regard to facilitating cooperation between different actors, one can see that broadening stakeholder involvement in using VNIL for lifelong learning purposes in a work-setting has a relatively strong impact in 2 cases (cases 1 and 4), an average impact in 6 cases (cases 2-3, 5-7 and 9) and an apparent impact in 1 case (case 8). Only case 10 has no mention of any innovation whatsoever.

The 2nd and 3rd criteria are clearly interlinked. They indicate a strong or relatively strong steering role of external partners in the VNIL process in 7 cases (cases 1-6 and partly 9), an average steering role of external partners in 2 cases (cases 7 and 10) or an apparent

role in 2 cases (case 8 and partly 9). This has to be investigated of course more closely, but at least one observation is justified that VNIL in work-based learning settings attracts more/other/new partners in lifelong learning strategies. Some of these partners are involved for economic reasons (VNIL opens up a new market in learning for providers or helps fill in macro-level goals in creating new jobs and more entrepreneurship) and others for more social reasons (filling in local or regional goals concerning specific target group involvement on the labour market or strengthening programmes on job-creation and fighting poverty). The issue of the influence of competence frameworks on VNIL in the workplace is also present in this observation since these kinds of frameworks pave the way for a great deal of these partners in VNIL. In all cases VNIL focuses on competence-based standards, irrespective whether they are set by VET, higher education or the different economic sectors themselves.

The 6th criterion finally aims at making clear that the perceived level of ownership by the individual worker of the VNIL-process is an important point for further analysis. After all, it is with VNIL that an individual worker can 'build a statue of him / herself' or at least show that his/her glass is half-filled. The level in which this aspect is already present in the cases differs from relatively strong (cases 1-2), average (cases 3-5 and 8), apparent (cases 6-7), low (case 9) and absent (case 10).

### 3.5 Analysis of the 'new' cases

The 'new' cases in the theme of work-based competence development and recognition cover three different countries and sectors:<sup>3</sup>

- a) VNIL-steered career management & personal development. Rockwool B.V. (The Netherlands).
- b) Brevet fédéral de spécialiste en gestion de PME - Projet pilote validation des acquis.

Schweizerischer Gewerbeverband SGV (Switzerland).

- c) Guards. Navreme Boheme, s.r.o. (Czech Republic).

#### 3.5.1 Rockwool

The ROCKWOOL Group is the world's leading supplier of innovative products and systems based on stone wool, improving the environment and the quality of life. This case study is about the plant in Roermond, the Netherlands where about 1.200 people work (400 office and 800 production). Since the 1990s the role of learning is a key element in the human resource management-policy of Rockwool. In the plant in Roermond this human resource management-policy can be regarded as an ongoing process of linking learning and working for each individual employee by means of competence-steered assessment methods and work-based development-programs:

- Assessment is considered as a summative and a formative method for enhancing performance of not only the employees for the company but also of the company for the employees.
- Learning is oriented towards increasing the level of qualifications and facilitating the employability and personal development of staff. On the one hand this is aimed at strengthening work-processes, and on the other hand at empowering employees and increasing their internal and external career-opportunities.
- VNIL is used as a method for sustainable human resource management by linking the potential of employees with the need for specific competence profiles in different areas of the company

The company has made use of VNIL since 2001 with the intention of broadening the classical approach of human resource

<sup>3</sup> For further information see: <http://www.OBSERVATION-NET.eu/content/work-based-competence-development-and-recognition#sthash.vssDVO6u.dpuf>

management focusing on qualifications and certificates. Instead Rockwool sought a more staff-steered human resource management, which included employees in the decision-making on learning objectives. The ever-changing technological developments, the shortage of qualified staff, the internal demand for more flexibility and employability, convinced Rockwool to incorporate VNIL in the existing training and development policy of the company.

From 2003 to 2013, 77 employees engaged in multiple VNIL-processes and 9 in a single VNIL process. During the same period 450 employees participated in traditional learning programs at VET-schools. So, about 16% of all staff involved in training in the last 10 years has benefitted from VNIL. Moreover, during the same period, 55 staff-members were involved in VNIL as assessors, guidance personnel, managers and human resource management-staff.

The 'Rockwool Career model' offers all employees the opportunity to grow. But while the focus has been previously exclusively on formal training, employees may now choose to further their training in any way that best meets their needs and ensures that competence profiles of a specific job position are being met, whether it is based on work-based learning, self-study, distance learning, coaching-on-the-job or external traineeships, amongst others. VNIL is the cornerstone in this human resource management-policy of Rockwool with a focus on the self-steered character of learning for the sake of both the company as well as the employee him/herself.

### 3.5.2 Schweizerischer Gewerbeverband

As in Europe, family SMEs are the backbone of the Swiss economy. They are mainly led by spouses who learn business management on the job. VNIL is an opportunity for them to make knowledge, skills and competences acquired in non-formal and informal settings visible. This allows them to obtain recognition for their high level of professional qualification. At a time when Switzerland is suffering from the global economic crisis, validation of all relevant competences, no matter how they have been acquired, is more relevant than ever for the functioning of the labour market and for enhancing competitiveness and economic growth. In addition, family SMEs are struggling to find buyers for lack of succession within the family.

In response to this important need for recognition and certification, the Schweizerischer Gewerbeverband

SGV (Swiss Association of small and medium sized enterprises) has established a new nationally recognised diploma in the management of SMEs with a specialisation in the management of family SMEs – the Federal Professional Education and Training Diploma. This diploma is specifically designed for spouses of family SME owners which can be obtained both by modular route and VNIL. This initiative aims to encourage spouses – and more generally people actively involved in the management of a company – to get their skills acquired through work experience recognised and to seek additional support to achieve a higher level of qualification. In so doing, this initiative is empowering individuals to assume their responsibilities with greater confidence and even consider a succession.

The project also includes a tailor-made VNIL accompaniment method and tools enabling spouses to optimise their time, facilitate the preparation of the VNIL portfolio, and to avoid drop-out by taking into account the specific needs and constraints of company managers with family responsibilities.

The project will therefore have impact on beneficiaries but also on VET providers, especially counsellors, advisers and consultants, who will be equipped with concrete tools / measurement methods and be prepared and trained for the effective operation of VNIL processes for women who are underrepresented in higher management. In this way the project will also contribute to increasing equal opportunities.

### 3.5.3 Navreme Boheme

The background for this case in the Czech Republic is Act No. 179/2006 Coll. and its new amendment of the verification and recognition of continuing education outcomes. In this way it sets up legislative conditions for advancing in VNIL.

The project 'NQF 2' has created a national register of vocational qualifications, which is a publicly accessible register of all full and partial qualifications and their qualification and assessment standards with a national objective of creating an open area of lifelong learning and supporting recognition and validation of non-formal learning. The tool can be used by people pursuing the recognition of the knowledge and skills they have acquired during their work, in courses or through self-study.

The National Institute for Education has registered

about 70,000 passed professional qualifications, with 90% of them being the exams of profession guard. The evaluation process of this profession involved over 200 authorization persons, firms and education institutions from all over the Czech Republic.

(through-take) and helping staff to an external career (out-take). In this sense human resource management may be better understood as human resource development.

### 3.6 Conclusions and recommendations

The analysis of the three 'new' cases in the observatory within the theme of work-based competence development recognition, confirms the analysis of the 'old' case studies. Therefore, with regard to promoting work-based competence development and recognition the following recommendations may be made:

- Best practices in the use of VNIL in the context of work-based competence development and recognition seem to evolve especially in practices with a multi-stakeholder involvement, both in the formulation of learning objectives as well as the use of VNIL for reaching these objectives.
- Initiatives with the involvement of employees in the formulation of the learning objectives score best, also in terms of reaching the said objectives through a VNIL-supported learning process.
- Work-based competence development and recognition functions best in a sector-context, since in this context the link between an employee's prior learning achievements and achieving the learning objectives in a sector-specific context can be best achieved.
- Evidence from the cases suggests that both short-term as well as longer-term learning can be achieved with the support of VNIL. However, in practice long-term objectives appear to hold value only, if there are also short-term effects.
- Work-based competence development and recognition serves a diversity of strategies in human resource management. However, the main focus is on increasing the employability of individuals, which may be achieved through obtaining qualifications that contribute to professionalization.
- VNIL focussed on increasing an individual's employability has to be interpreted as a strategy for getting and keeping a job and is embedded in human resource management for reasons of hiring new staff (in-take), investing in staff



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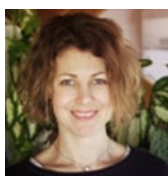
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**Janine Voit** works as head of research field »learning outcomes« at the Swiss Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (SFIVET) in Switzerland. She is active in the field of recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNIL) for more than fifteen years. As a psychologist and adult educator, she has been developing different portfolio approaches as well as recognition and validation processes for various audiences. She contributed to the development of the national framework for validation in the upper secondary VET system and contributed to different expert reports and evaluations in this field. Currently she leads different national and internal projects regarding validation and learning outcomes. She is also active in the training of VNIL professionals.



**Sonja Lengauer** works as deputy director for education & society within the Federation of Austrian Industries. She is a social pedagogue and holds a Master degree in educational sciences. Sonja has been working in different parts of the education system: IMC University of Applied Sciences Krems, Federal Ministry of Education, the Arts and Culture, Oead GmbH and 3s consultancy / 3s research laboratory. Her focus is on education policy within vocational education and training, lifelong learning, continuing education, transparency instruments (EQF/NOF, ECVET, validation of non-formal and informal learning), development of competences and the learning outcomes approach. Sonja has been volunteering as a trainer in several seminars for adults within the (further) education of youth leaders.



Magistra **Eva Proinger** studied at the University of Vienna and holds a diploma degree in Educational Science. Her occupational activities include quantitative and qualitative analyses of labour market needs and study programs for universities and universities of applied sciences. She was working in the field of adult education and assisting in research and consulting projects at 3s research laboratory, mainly with a focus on VET and the tertiary sector (EQAVET/VET-CERT). Presently, she is working at the University of Applied Sciences, FH Campus Vienna, on a project to develop and evaluate didactic competencies, promote the integration of new educational technology and to improve the quality of academic teaching.



**Ruud Duvekot** has been involved in policy (-making and -research) on lifelong learning strategies and the validation of non-formal and informal learning since 1995. He founded the "Kenniscentrum EVC", the Dutch knowledgecentre on the Validation of Prior Learning (VPL).

Currently he works as associate professor 'personalized learning' at Inholland University of Applied Sciences, the Netherlands. He also chairs the foundations 'European Centre Valuation Prior Learning' ([www.vpl4.eu](http://www.vpl4.eu)) for research and design of validation-applications and 'CH-Q NL/B' ([www.ch-q.nl](http://www.ch-q.nl)) for portfolio management and -training.  
[rduvekot@gmail.com](mailto:rduvekot@gmail.com)



**Kirsten Aagaard** is the head of the National Knowledge Centre for Validation of Prior Learning (NVR) since 2007 and the head of the Centre for Lifelong Learning since 2011. She is responsible for several research and development projects in validation of prior learning and involved in development, implementation and evaluation of validation activities. She has years of experience in the field of adult learning and education, nationally and internationally as well as contacts and networks in the field of validation of prior learning nationally and internationally. She cooperates with ministries, social partners, educational institutions, universities and stakeholders in the field of VPL. Moreover, she is a member of the Expert Network for Validation in the Nordic Network for Adult Learning ([www.nordvux.net](http://www.nordvux.net)).  
[kiaa@viauc.dk](mailto:kiaa@viauc.dk)

## A Abbreviations

AE	Adult Education
APEL	Accreditation of Prior and Experimental Learning
APL	Accreditation of Prior Learning
CEDEFOP	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
ECVET	European Credit System in Vocational Education and Training
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
EU	European Union
HE	Higher Education
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
PET	Professional Education and Training
R&D	Research and development
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
RPLO	Recognition of Prior Learning Outcomes
RVCC	Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences
RVPL	Recognition and Validation of Prior learning
SCQF	Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework
SME	Small and Medium Enterprises
third sector	non-profit sector
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VNIL	Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning
VPL	Validation of Prior learning

## A Appendix I: Questionnaire used for the case studies analysed in Chapter 1

Questions for the first tagging of case studies to identify the examples of best practice in terms of a bottom-up approach/grassroots initiative

Country:

Title of the case study:

Link to the OBSERVAL website:

		Yes	No	Details
1	Are professional groups, local organizations, executing institutions or providers reacting to identified needs?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
2	Is the process of development driven by professional groups, local organizations, institutions or certain providers?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
3	Did professional groups, local organizations, executing institutions or providers take the initiative to launch the process?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
4	Is the action a local one?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
5	Has the action become a general one?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
6	Was the action driven by collaboration between several local entities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
7	Has the action contributed to develop the legal framework (ie from "bottom" to "top")?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
8	Has the action contributed to develop a new qualification?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
9	Has the action been supported (financially, HR,...) by authorities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
10	Was the action a pilot one?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

## A Appendix II: List of case studies analysed in Chapter 1 and their authors

Country	Title of the case study (CS) and author	Contact details of the authors
AT	CS3: Informal Competence Acquisition and Educational Guidance  Written by Genoveva Brandstetter, Karin Luomi-Messerer (3s) based on an interview with Mr. Kellner	Mag. Wolfgang Kellner  office@ring.bildungswerke.at  <a href="http://ring.bildungswerke.at/">http://ring.bildungswerke.at/</a>
AT	CS1a: Wissen, was ich kann – Burgenland ('I know what I can')  Written by Mariya Dzengozova, Sonja Lengauer (3s) based on an interview with Mrs. Teuschler	Dr.in Christine Teuschler  halbturn@vhs-burgenland.at <a href="http://www.vhs-burgenland.at/ind_kompetenz.html">http://www.vhs-burgenland.at/ind_kompetenz.html</a>
AT	CS2 wba (short for "Weiterbildungsakademie Österreich"/Austrian Academy of Continuing Education)  Written by Karin Reisinger (update)	Mag.a Karin Reisinger  karin.reisinger@wba.or.at  <a href="http://wba.or.at/">http://wba.or.at/</a>
CH	CS1: Val-Form qualification procedure for metalworkers  Written by Saskia Weber Guisan	Office d'orientation scolaire et professionnelle du canton du Valais et Val-Form  <a href="http://www.vs.ch/Navig/navig.asp?MenuID=19238">http://www.vs.ch/Navig/navig.asp?MenuID=19238</a>  lionel.clavien@admin.vs.chor jerome.lorenz@admin.vs.ch
CH	CS2: Community interpreters  Written by Furio Bednarz	Interpret  <a href="http://www.inter-pret.ch/fr.html">http://www.inter-pret.ch/fr.html</a>  <a href="http://www.inter-pret.ch/fr/formation-certification-et-assurance-qualite/validation-des-acquis.html">http://www.inter-pret.ch/fr/formation-certification-et-assurance-qualite/validation-des-acquis.html</a>
CH	CS3: Equivalence assessment for the Federal PET Diploma in Adult Education and Training  Written by Barbara Petrini	Swiss Federation of Adult Learning  www.alice.ch  <a href="http://www.alice.ch/fr/ada/validation-des-acquis-va/validation-des-acquis-brevet-federal/">http://www.alice.ch/fr/ada/validation-des-acquis-va/validation-des-acquis-brevet-federal/</a>
CH	CS4: Federal PET diploma in specialist in SME management – Pilot project in VNIL  Written by Line Pillet and Christine Davatz	Schweizerischer Gewerbeverband SGV  Union Suisse des arts et métiers USAM  <a href="http://www.sgv-usam.ch">http://www.sgv-usam.ch</a>  c.davatz@sgv-usam.ch

Country	Title of the case study (CS) and author	Contact details of the authors
CH	CS5: The VNIL process in SFIVET Lausanne: Genesis of a bottom-up innovation Written by Ana Albornoz	Swiss federal institute for vocational education and training SFIVET <a href="http://www.ehb-schweiz.ch/en">http://www.ehb-schweiz.ch/en</a> <a href="mailto:ana.albornoz@iffp-suisse.ch">ana.albornoz@iffp-suisse.ch</a> <a href="mailto:patrick.rywalski@iffp-suisse.ch">patrick.rywalski@iffp-suisse.ch</a>
DE	CS1: Support of a young unemployed man to find an adequate apprenticeship through assessment Written by Ina Grieb	LEB Niedersachsen e.V. <a href="http://www.leb-niedersachsen.de/index.cfm">http://www.leb-niedersachsen.de/index.cfm</a>
DK	CS1: Authentic ways methodology, Jette's case Written by Agnete Nordentoft	AARHUS TECH, Halmstadgade 6, DK-8200 Aarhus N <a href="http://aarhustech.dk/">http://aarhustech.dk/</a> <a href="mailto:mail@aarhustech.dk">mail@aarhustech.dk</a>
DK	CS2: third sector involvement in preparing for VPL-training of "sparring partners" Written by Agnete Nordentoft	Danish Association of Adult Education (DAEA) <a href="http://www.daea.dk/">http://www.daea.dk/</a> Agnete Nordentoft: <a href="mailto:an@dfs.dk">an@dfs.dk</a>
DK	CS3: The involvement of the union 3F in VPL Written by Agnete Nordentoft	Union 3F <a href="http://www.3f.dk">www.3f.dk</a>
ES	CS1: Car Industry Written by Tomás Díez González / Luis Carro	No information available.
NL	CS1: Fire department Written by Hugerien van Steenis and Ruud Duvekot	Hugerien van Steenis <a href="mailto:h.van.steenis@brw.vrzhz.nl">h.van.steenis@brw.vrzhz.nl</a> 0031 6 5123 7686 <a href="http://www.brandweernederland.nl/">http://www.brandweernederland.nl/</a>
PT	CS1: Process of Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences in Baby-sitters and Educational Technical Assistants Associação Cultural Moinho da Juventude (Youth's Windmill Cultural Association)	Associação Cultural Moinho da Juventude, Travessa do Outeiro,1, Alto da Cova da Moura, 2610-202 Buraca <a href="mailto:dir-moinho@mail.telepac.pt">dir-moinho@mail.telepac.pt</a> 214971070 214905120
SE	CS1: Validation in Vetlanda Learning Centre	<a href="http://www.vetlanda.se/vanstermeny/vad-sokerdu/utbildningjobb/utbildningforvux-na.4.16b903e1110d97f01b2800010530.htm">http://www.vetlanda.se/vanstermeny/vad-sokerdu/utbildningjobb/utbildningforvux-na.4.16b903e1110d97f01b2800010530.htm</a>

# A Appendix III: OBSERVAL-NET Manifesto on wider access and cooperation for strengthening validation practices in Europe

By Aune Valk on behalf of the OBSERVAL-NET Consortium

## Europe needs competent people

Enhancing competences, developing better skills and knowledge for more people are at the centre of policy aims across all European countries. Europe strives by 2020 to reduce the rates of early school leaving below 10% and to achieve rates of at least 40% of 30-34 year-olds completing third level education. The aim is that more adults can and will participate in lifelong learning and more children go to pre-school. The OECD Skills Strategy (2012) stresses the importance of skills development for economic growth and labour productivity: a shortage of skills can increase the hiring cost of skilled people and become an obstacle for innovation, competitiveness and adoption of new technologies. But beside the labour market, better educated and more competent people are also an investment in building a more cohesive society – higher civic and social engagement and more trust between people.

## Skills surplus and lack of skills

However, when surveyed it appears that there are more people who report having a surplus of skills than those who lack skills. Skills mismatch (both lack and surplus) is the key focus of the EU 2020 flagship initiative “New skills for new jobs” promoting better anticipation of future skills needs; development of better matching between skills and labour market needs, and bridging the gap between the worlds of education and work. Finding the right balance between skills demand in the changing labour market, skills development in educational institutions and existing and constantly changing skills supply by people, is a big challenge for all parties. Regarding the demand side, CEDEFOP foresees in its recent Skills Forecast for 2020 that there is a risk of skills polarisation: most new jobs will be at the higher and lower end of the job spectrum. They also predict a continuation of the trend towards more skill-intensive jobs at all levels and the decline of many traditional manual or routine jobs. But despite these trends there will also be over-qualification in the short term: the supply of people with high-level qualifications will exceed the numbers of jobs requiring that level of qualification.

## Validation as a tool for better match of skills and qualifications

Skill mismatch is not just about the discrepancy between demand and supply as measured by the level of qualifications, it may be equally about the lack of the ‘right’ skills in the relevant field compared to the required competences, or not being aware of the skills demand and/or supply. Putting existing skills to effective use is one of the three major strategic action lines in OECD skills strategy.

CEDEFOP recognises that macro level skill forecasts have limits and more detailed sector, national or regional skill analyses are essential to improve the match between demand and supply. Partnerships of various stakeholders, including education and training providers, social partners and employment services are necessary to improve labour market intelligence and coordination.

VNIL (Validation of non-formal and informal learning) is one of the key tools for solving the puzzles related to skills mismatch. Validation makes competences visible and helps adults to progress their training while also improving labour market information about the existing skills supply. Current VNIL practices have been more driven by skills supply than demand. Educational institutions and people having different competences but no qualification have been more active in VNIL than the bodies which actually require the skills. Demand driven VNIL and stronger cooperation between individuals, employers and educational institutions is one of the future challenges. Methods and tools for validating skills that are explicitly needed on the labour market, with employers as the key drivers of this process, should get more attention. It is very important that in this process people are recognised and rewarded stressing that the glass of their competences is half full, not half empty.

## The position of validation at policy level

The importance of VNIL has been underlined consistently by European policy processes starting with initiatives such as the Bologna Process for higher education and the Copenhagen Process for vocational education and training, and has been developed since. There are Common European Principles (2004) for the identification and validation of nonformal and informal learning; European Guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning (CEDEFOP 2009/ 2011);



and a European Inventory for the validation of non-formal and informal learning (data from 2004, 2005, 2007, 2010). Several policy documents (European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning and related national frameworks) and tools (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System -ECTS-; European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training -ECVET- Europass, Youthpass) support VNIL. On a global level, both OECD and UNESCO have addressed the relevance of recognition and validation.

But VNIL practices are still lagging behind in most European countries. According to the European Inventory on the validation of non-formal and informal learning of 2010, only four EU Member States have a highly developed validation system and progress is said to be uneven and slow across countries. In order to change the situation the European Council adopted recommendations on the validation of non-formal and informal learning on 20 December 2012. According to the recommendations, member states should, by no later than 2018, have in place arrangements for the VNIL which enable individuals to validate their skills and knowledge for obtaining a partial or full qualification. Among other things, the recommendations stress the development of the professional competences of staff involved in the validation process across all relevant sectors, and the inclusion and involvement of all stakeholders such as employers, trade unions, chambers of industry, commerce and skilled crafts, national entities involved in the process of recognition of professional qualifications, employment services, youth organisations, youth workers, education and training providers, and civil society organisations.

### **OBSERVATION-NET promotes validation practices**

Over the past decades the European Commission policy has promoted (and continues to promote) the development and implementation of VNIL practices at different levels, providing opportunities for networking and peer learning, sharing best practices, testing tools, and elaborating training materials, guidelines etc. OBSERVATION-NET partners have extensive experience in realising validation policies in different educational sectors and institutions, together with employers and other stakeholders (including trade unions, NGOs) at local, regional, national and European levels. OBSERVATION-NET project has facilitated the creation of a transversal network capable of developing national and transnational evidencebased models of best practices in VNIL. The project also analysed examples of best VNIL practices across European countries and mainstreams these practices through strategic development and policy making at national-regional level. The European Observatory of VNIL developed within the OBSERVATION

project and elaborated within the OBSERVATION-NET project is an example of an open-source platform for sharing VNIL practices across Europe between the many stakeholders, practitioners and professionals.

### **Invitation to take the next steps**

Taking into account the vast experience and extensive cooperation among different stakeholders, and in line with the European Council recommendations for facilitating effective peer learning and exchanges of experience and good practice, the OBSERVATION-NET partners invite:

- authorities at all levels to take responsibility for supporting and motivating educational institutions to take initiatives in providing wider and better VNIL practices and informing them about VNIL needs;
- all stakeholders active in VNIL to share resources about best VNIL practices. The Observatory is an important source that can operate both as a home for different case studies but also as a source alongside other similar initiatives;
- educational institutions to make active use of the competenceprofile for VNIL practitioners in developing training for people providing guidance, counselling or providing VNIL assessment. If necessary, the competence-profile can be developed further and adapted to the national and local needs;
- employers, trade unions and 3rd sector organisations to take an active part in thinking and designing demand-based approaches, methods and tools for VNIL. Every learning outcome is valuable but adults are more motivated to validate their skills and competences -and if necessary obtain new skills and competencesif it is driven by clear prospects on the labour market and other forms of social participation in society;
- all professionals working in the domain of lifelong learning to create a learning community on VNIL- methodology and practices;
- people themselves to be active in demanding more and better VNIL practices from all institutions and share experiences (via the Observatory or other tools) of the grass-root initiatives in VNIL.

Citation given in the original Manifesto, as follows:

**Citation:** Valk, A., on behalf of the OBSERVATION-NET consortium (Ed.) (2013): OBSERVATION-NET Manifesto on wider access and cooperation for strengthening validation practices in Europe. Barcelona.

# A Appendix IV: Advocacy Pack

## Validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNIL)

### Introduction

In December 2012 the European Council called on Member States to enhance their Validation practices in several aspects by 2018.

More specifically the recommendations refer to:

- the link between validation and national qualifications frameworks
- making accessible information, guidance, and counselling on the benefits of, and opportunities for validation
- special attention to be given to disadvantaged groups and individuals who are unemployed or at risk of unemployment
- quality assurance measures that support reliable, valid and credible assessment methodologies and tools
- development of the professional competences of staff involved in the validation process
- the equivalence of qualifications obtained by means of VNIL and qualifications obtained through formal education programmes
- the use of European Union transparency tools, such as the Europass framework and Youthpass for validation

Key stakeholders in this process are employer organisations, individual employers, trade unions, chambers of industry, commerce and skilled crafts, national entities involved in the process of recognising professional qualifications and in assessing and certifying learning outcomes, employment services, youth organisations, youth workers, training providers, as well as civil society organisations.

The OBSERVAL-NET consortium, with more than 18 strong partner institutions throughout Europe, has a wealth of experience and knowledge in validation covering all educational sectors assembling different learning cultures, traditions and educational systems. In response to and in line with the European Council recommendations and based on our extensive

experience in promoting validation, OBSERVAL-NET has developed the advocacy pack that you have here with special attention given to promoting VNIL in 3 sectors:

- 1 Working life**
- 2 Educational institutions**
- 3 Civil society**

In our manifesto for wider cooperation and more informed validation practices in Europe "COOPERATE TO VALIDATE" we turn attention to:

- sharing resources about best VNIL practices and promote the Observatory of
- validation
- making active use of the competence profile for VNIL practitioners
- enhancing a demand based approach, methods and tools for VNIL
- showing the relevance and value of grass root initiatives in VNIL.

### Fact Sheets

#### Grass-Root Initiatives in VNIL. The Bottom-Up Approach

##### What is a bottom-up process?

In VNIL processes, members of civil society – such as local organisations, NGO's, professional groups – play an important role in taking the initiative to develop actions in response to identified needs. These actions are implemented through the strong and active role and involvement of practitioners or institutions and are aimed at valuing citizens' competences for (re)entering the labour market, increasing mobility, shortening training programmes and dealing with legal constraints in the formal educational system.

Bottom-up processes may question, influence or destabilise existing systems (legal or educational frameworks). They can also lead to establishing

new frameworks. Thus, bottom-up and top-down processes can hardly be separated from each other; in a way, they are related to each other and both together build a dynamic and circular system.

### Perspectives and challenges

- A key success factor is ownership: transparent roles and tasks (leader, coordinator, financial and political support, scientific expertise, political/institutional endorsement) within the bottom-up - VNIL - initiative. Moreover, transparency and constant negotiation between the partners involved throughout the process seems to be essential.
- Experiences between VNIL stakeholders (including candidates) is shared: bringing together areas with different levels of progress and experience with VNIL is useful as it allows the participants to learn from one another, reduce isolation and re-inject dynamism into the process.
- A bottom-up approach may occasion heterogeneous practices that might lead to a fragmented and non-cohesive range of experiences. Thus, a lack of political will to manage a legal or organised framework will maintain the situation in its original form without taking advantage of different practices' richness. This is why, even though too many regulations hinder local and creative initiatives, a legal framework is crucial to stabilise and secure the bottom-up process in order to ensure the sustainability and transferability of VNIL processes and procedures.

### Be Inspired by 3 cases of Best Practice

Academy of New Media and Knowledge Transfer. Karl Franzens-Universität Graz (AUSTRIA)

**BACKGROUND:** The Academy of New Media and Knowledge Transfer developed a competence portfolio model to ensure that students recognise their skills, get to know different knowledge fields and visualise informal learning processes. In addition to that, the competence portfolio model should improve the employability of students and support them during a lifelong learning process.

**ACTION:** An innovative competence portfolio model. Since 2008, the University offers workshops and individual coaching where participants learn to identify, reflect on and communicate their skills & competences.

**RESULTS:** The model has been used for various target groups and in different occupational fields. It has been

applied by different institutions (in cooperation with the Academy of New Media and Knowledge Transfer) and in different contexts. As a substitute for a traditional CV, the portfolio model has proved to be an important tool for writing job applications, applications for further education, job interviews, and most important, for the validation of informal learning.

### Weiterbildungsakademie Österreich - wba (AUSTRIA)

**BACKGROUND:** As there is no standardised formal education for adult educators (i.e. trainers, advisors/counsellors, educational managers and librarians) in Austria there was a common consensus that a means of qualification was needed. Most adult educators brought a proof of their work to wba. The main goal of wba was to acknowledge relevant prior learning outcomes and summarise them into a specific and widely recognised qualification with a final degree.

**ACTION:** after a 3-year conceptual phase wba started a new approach recognising acquired competences of adult educators, acknowledging prior learning outcomes and offering guidance for the acquisition of skills identified as missing.

**RESULTS:** wba set up standards and fostered the professionalisation of Austrian adult education. wba does not offer further education programmes itself, it accredits suitable further education programmes offered by various adult education institutes throughout Austria.

### Burgenländische Volkshochschulen (AUSTRIA)

**BACKGROUND:** It was identified as necessary to reduce barriers to gainful employment for women who lack the formal qualifications that make them immediately employable in South and Central Burgenland. 21% of the residents of Burgenland aged between 25 and 64 have no higher educational degree, only compulsory studies.

**ACTION:** Two initiatives started. (1) 'Wissen, was ich kann' - "I know what I can" - where participants create a personal competence portfolio in which they learn to establish, assess and evidence their competences and merits from various areas of activities, verify learning processes, draw conclusions, etc.

(2) 'Du kannst was' "You have skills" connected to the validation of competences acquired in informal learning leading to the acquirement of a certificate of apprenticeship.

**RESULTS:** The achievement of the status of a certified/qualified skilled worker means an improvement for the employees concerning labour law provisions and it enhances the opportunities/prospects on the labour

market.

## The New Profession - Competence Profiles for VNIL Professions

The role of VNIL practitioners is essential for quality and trust in the outcomes of the validation process and important for the long term impact and credibility of validation. In policy statements and policy papers Competence Development for the practitioners is in focus. This is highlighted also in the COUNCIL RECOMMENDATIONS published 20 December 2012. Thus, the issue of strengthening the professionalism of validating practitioners is central to effective validation processes.

### Who are the validation practitioners?

In the European Guidelines for Validating non formal and informal learning (2009), VNIL professionals are named validation practitioners. Validation practitioners cover all aspects of validation and are divided in five categories:

- Counsellors that offer information, advice and guidance
- Assessors that carry out assessment
- External observers of the process
- Process managers of assessment centres/ procedures
- A range of other stakeholders that have an important but less direct role in the validation process

### Studies and analysis tell us that...

Counsellors and assessors play key roles and the systematic development of their professional skills must be given priority.

A number of other practitioners are also involved in validation and it is also important to discuss their roles.

There appears to be a lot of educational activity going on in the field of VNIL, but it is mainly organised as short courses and seminars. Competence development for VNIL practitioners so far are characterised as project based, sporadic and informal.

The VNIL profession is more a practice than a profession so far. A new profession (or maybe professions) might be emerging.

### Perspectives and challenges:

- One major challenge is to develop and describe the profession(s) as distinct with its own professional standards
- A need for more systematic learning activities and formal educational offers for counsellors and assessors
- A common educational offer across the European countries
- Networks and collaboration between practitioners at local, regional, national and European levels across EU.

## Be Inspired by 3 cases of Best Practice

### Savo Consortium for Education, EUedu (FINLAND)

**BACKGROUND:** Several teacher training colleges in Finland have provided mandatory training for Finnish VET professionals since 1995, focused on Finnish adult VET, a relatively narrow view on VNIL.

**ACTION:** A 5 module training programme was developed shedding light on European aspects and policy outlines on VNIL arising from future changes in the Finnish legislation (NQF and ECVET) and enabling the Finnish VNIL providers to gain deeper knowledge and understanding.

**RESULTS:** Over 1000 participants have taken the full course or participated in modules in eight different cities. Two regional organisations have amended their pedagogical strategy. 200 learning outcome based training programmes were developed as assignments, thus making the validation process more transparent. Six regional VET organisations have made an action plan for implementation of ECVET. 90% of the participants reported that the training course was useful for their work. Participants from over 20 VET institutions and companies in Russia have participated in the training proving that transfer to different contexts is possible.

### ECAP Foundation R&D Unit and Swiss Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training, SFIVET (SWITZERLAND)

**BACKGROUND:** VNIL is managed by people who do not have a specific qualification on the area of Validation. VNIL actors move in a new professional field. Acting in VNIL implies the possession of specific competences, adequately built up, assessed and valued.

**ACTION:** The VALIDO project focuses at developing a shared approach to VNIL outcomes, in order to



improve matching between supply and demand in regional trans-border job market.

**RESULTS:** The Lombardy Region in Italy is going to develop a comprehensive validation system, valuing amongst others the results of the VALIDO Project in terms of a model and qualification for VNIL specialists. It is a good example of cross-fertilisation between different EU initiatives, considering methods, tools and results of learning.

#### Danish Adult Education Association - DAEA (DENMARK)

**BACKGROUND:** A web based tool has been developed by the Danish Ministry of Education for clarifying and documenting VNIL in the third sector, focused on general/personal competences. The use of the tool proved to be difficult for some targeted groups as they are very diverse.

**ACTION:** The Danish Association of Adult Education (DAEA) initiated training courses for the professionals to work with VNIL in general and more specifically the new tool in experimental ways as it proved hard to use it without extensive facilitation.

**RESULTS:** A substantial degree of knowledge sharing among the participants in the DAEA's courses and the follow up evaluation seminar. The experimental approaches to using the electronic tool have reached a wider range of professionals via presentations at national and international conferences addressing professionals from formal as well as non-formal learning institutions.

#### Work-Based Competence Development and Recognition

VNIL is intended to recognise and to validate people's visible and invisible skills. The workplace is considered to be a powerful learning environment for acquiring and developing competences. Key learning points:

- Organisations/companies must ensure that their formulation of demands is effective. Formulation of demands means that there is clarity concerning (1) the competences present within the organisation, and (2) the required competences within the framework of the organisational aims. A match can be made between (1) and (2), so that (3) the competency demands within the organisation and ultimately an action plan (4) for the validation and development of already acquired competences, as well as those that need to be developed, emerges.

- Employees need to be as self-reliant and programme independent as possible in the elaboration of their personal development programmes following a VNIL-procedure. In this sense, it is up to the individual to make choices concerning the degree of self-determination or external direction within the development programme. Choices range between 100 % self-determination of the form and content of the programme (empowerment) and 0 % (pampering).
- A more customer centred orientation of education institutions towards organisations/businesses is needed in order to help anchor VNIL in Human Resource Development (HRD). On the other hand, increased formulation of demands is needed from organisations/businesses in order to help anchor VNIL in the policy of educational institutions.
- Collaboration between public and private organisations and educational establishments is essential to ensure workbased learning can be customised following the VNIL-procedure. Companies have to facilitate and provide guidance in workplace learning, and educational establishments must accept and value the workplace as a learning environment.
- Research is needed into the added value of VNIL, among other things focussed on its economic, financial and social effects and also the relation with other assessment systems (e.g. in-company, social, etc.).

**Voluntary work** is equally important for work-based competence development and recognition as work in public and private sectors. Voluntary work allows volunteers to acquire and develop competences and to improve specific qualities (mutual aid, altruism, cooperative spirit). It offers opportunities to learn and to acquire work experience and to become an active citizen. Assessing voluntary experiences could be a way to bridge the gap between voluntary work and employment.

#### Be Inspired by 3 cases of Best Practice

##### Rockwool B.V. (NETHERLANDS)

**BACKGROUND:** Since the 1990s the role of learning is a key element in the human resource management (HRM) policy of Rockwool. This HRM policy can be regarded as an on-going process of linking learning and working for each individual employee by means of competence-steered assessment methods and work-based development-programs.

**ACTION:** VNIL came into practice in 2001 when the company wanted to broaden the classical approach of HRM, and its focus on formal learning outcomes like qualifications and certificates, with the co-ownership with employees in the decision making on learning goals.

**RESULTS:** In the period of 2003-2013, 77 employees were involved in a multiple VNIL procedure and 9 in a single VNIL procedure. In the same period 450 employees filled in traditional learning programmes at VET schools. Thus, 16% of all staff active in any form of learning, were involved in VNIL training. Indirectly, 55 staff members were involved in VNIL in the same period: assessors, guiders, managers and HRM staff.

Schweizerischer Gewerbeverband SGV (SWITZERLAND)

**BACKGROUND:** Switzerland faces a considerable shortage of skilled workers in some specific areas. This is especially evident among SMEs, which are usually led by the owner. In most of the SMEs the spouse supports her partner in administration, financial and other management matters, but her work has no national recognition.

**ACTION:** Creation of a new nationally recognised diploma in the management of SMEs with a specialisation in the management of family SMEs specifically designed for spouses of family SME owners, obtained both by modular route and VNIL. It aims to encourage spouses and/or family to get their skills acquired through work experience recognised and to seek additional support to achieve a higher level of qualification.

**RESULTS:** The standard Swiss VNIL process has been adapted to include a tailor made VNIL with a coaching process, a self-assessment tool, an equivalence and a performance folder enabling spouses to optimise their time, facilitate the preparation of the VNIL portfolio and to avoid drop-out. Around 100 spouses have shown interest in the programme. 15 spouses are currently engaged in this VNIL programme.

Navreme Boheme, s.r.o. (CZECH REPUBLIC)

**BACKGROUND:** Act No. 179/2006 Coll. and its new amendment of the Verification and Recognition of Continuing Education Outcomes sets up legislative conditions for advancing in VNIL.

**ACTION:** The project "eNOF 2" has created a National Register of Vocational Qualifications, which is a publicly accessible register of all full and partial qualifications and their qualification and assessment standards with a national objective to create an open area of lifelong learning and supporting recognition and validation of

non-formal learning. The tool can be used by people pursuing the recognition of the knowledge and skills they have acquired during their work, in courses or through self-study.

**RESULTS:** The National Institute for Education has registered about 70,000 passed professional qualifications. 90% of all passed qualifications are the exams of the profession "Security Guard". The evaluation process of this profession involved over 200 authorization persons, firms and educational institutions from all over the Czech Republic.

### Useful References on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning

European Council of Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning:  
[http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/informal\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/informal_en.htm)

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## VNIL NEW PROFESSION

Aggaard, K et al.: New professions – competence profiles for VNIL professions: <http://www.observal-net.eu>

European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning: <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/aboutcedefop/projects/validation-of-non-formal-and-informal-learning/european-inventory.aspx>

European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning, 2009: <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/publications/5059.aspx>

## WORK-BASED COMPETENCE

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Commission of the European Communities (2000). A Memorandum on Lifelong learning. Brussels: CEC, SEC(2000) 1832: [http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/policy/memo\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/policy/memo_en.pdf)

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## A Appendix V OBSERVAL-NET Partners

Partners:		
P1	BE	EUCEN (project Coordinators)
P2	NL	Inholland University of Applied Sciences
P3	CH	Swiss Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training SFIVET
P4	DK	National Knowledge Centre for Validation of Prior Learning
P5	AT	3s research laboratory
P6	SI	CPZ-International Centre for Knowledge Promotion
P7	CZ	Navreme Boheme, s.r.o.
P8	FR	Centre Régional de Ressources Pédagogiques et de développement de la qualité et de la formation (C2RP)
P9	FR	Lille 1 University - Science and Technology
P10	LX	Ministère de l'Éducation nationale et de la Formation professionnelle
P11	NL	Regionaal Platform Arbeidsmarktbeleid Noord-Holland Noord
P12	CH	Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education EDK
P13	DK	Central Denmark Region
P14	AT	Federal Ministry of Education, the Arts and Culture
P15	SI	Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs
P16	CZ	Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports



WHY ARE GRASSROOTS INITIATIVES IMPORTANT IN VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING (VNIL) PROCESSES?

HOW CAN THESE INITIATIVES BE PROMOTED?

ARE WE PREPARING THE PROFESSIONALS DEDICATED TO THE VNIL FOR THEIR JOBS?

WHY A SPECIFIC PREPARATION IS NECESSARY AND SO IMPORTANT?

SHOULD EMPLOYERS PROMOTE INTERNAL WORK-BASED COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT AND RECOGNITION?

WHICH BENEFITS WOULD THESE PROCESSES BRING TO THEM AS WELL AS TO THEIR EMPLOYEES?

THE OBSERVATION-NET EXPERTS' REPORT ON VNIL CAN ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS, SHOW YOU REAL CASES OF GOOD PRACTICE AND GIVE YOU DETAILS OF THE STATE OF ART OF VNIL ACTIVITIES IN EUROPE IN 2013.

<http://observal.eucen.eu/>



Lifelong Learning Programme

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